United Nations S/2018/267

Security Council

Distr.: General
27 March 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 27 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter on behalf of the civil society groups active in Eastern Ghouta (see annex).

I should be most grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Karen **Pierce**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

18-04859 (E) 290318

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Annex to the letter dated 27 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

We address the President of the Security Council today, two weeks after the Secretary-General last briefed the Security Council on the non-implementation of Security Council resolution 2401 (2018) and the failure of the members of the Council to enforce Syria's nationwide ceasefire.

Since the Secretary-General's briefing on Security Council resolution 2401 (2018), attacks by the Syrian regime and its ally, Russia, have intensified, particularly in besieged Eastern Ghouta. Our partners on the ground have documented a major increase in the targeting of civilians through the use of internationally prohibited weapons, including cluster bombs, napalm and white phosphorus, as well as the toxic chemical, chlorine gas. We have also documented continued forced displacement, with tens of thousands of civilians forced into makeshift camps in the absence of any United Nations supervision. Recently, reports have circulated of men being interrogated and, in some cases, executed.

Resolution 2401 (2018) has gone wholly unenforced. Violations have passed without consequence. While members of the Security Council have spoken forcefully of the need to respect Council resolution 2401 (2018), no action has been taken to enforce it. As a result, violations have multiplied and Russia and the Syrian regime have continued with their plan to seize full control of Eastern Ghouta and to cleanse the areas of all inhabitants who reject their terror and tyranny.

Today, we call on the President of the Security Council to hold an emergency session of the Security Council in which you agree on the concrete actions needed to enforce Security Council resolution 2401 (2018) and deter the indiscriminate use of weapons and the deployment of prohibited weapons. If you cannot reach consensus — and Russia insists on recklessly wielding its veto — then we appeal to members of the Council to act in their own capacity to protect civilian lives in Syria, ensure all movement from Eastern Ghouta is voluntary, and stop the use of prohibited weapons. We also call for measures to protect the humanitarian aid workers and activists, who have chosen to remain inside Eastern Ghouta, despite the absence of any guarantees ensuring their safety.

Millions of lives will be affected by the failure of the Security Council to take tangible action now. After Eastern Ghouta, it is clear that the Syrian regime will set its sights on Dar'a, Idlib and the northern countryside of Homs. The millions of civilians in these areas are counting on the resolve and the determination of the Council to enforce the very resolutions which Council members have adopted. Lives can still be saved — but only if members of the Council have the will and courage to act.

Alseeraj for Development and Healthcare
Baytna Syria
Citizenship League
Dawlaty
The Day After project
Hurras Network
Joint Medical Chamber Syria
Local Administration Councils Unit
Local Development and Small Projects Support
Shaml, Syrian civil society coalition
Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression

Syrian Network for Human Rights
Syrian Women Association
Violations Documentation Center in Syria
Women Now for Development

United Nations S/2018/268

Security Council

Distr.: General
2 April 2018

Original: English

Identical letters dated 27 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Following the previous letters that I have addressed to you regarding the repeated and continuing terrorist attacks by armed terrorist groups on the city of Damascus and its suburbs, and upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to submit herewith a table clarifying the numbers of civilians killed and injured as a result of rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells launched by armed terrorist groups against safe neighbourhoods in Damascus and its suburbs on 23, 24 and 25 March 2018. These terrorist attacks have killed and wounded dozens of civilians, mostly children, and caused serious damage to public and private properties and infrastructure.

Date	*Number of rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells launched*	*Number of civilians killed*	*Number of civilians injured*
23 March 2018	1	–	–
24 March 2018	1	2	7
25 March 2018	1	–	2
Total	**3**	**2**	**9**

It would be highly appreciated if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

18-05115 (E) 040418

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United Nations S/2018/269

Security Council

Distr.: General
2 April 2018
English
Original: Arabic

Identical letters dated 27 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, and further to my identical letters of 9 March 2018 addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2018/213), I should like to inform you that a Bahraini fighter aircraft has committed yet another violation of the airspace over the territorial waters of Qatar.

At 1820 hours local time on Sunday, 25 March 2018, a Bahraini fighter aircraft was observed operating at an altitude of 22,000 feet and a speed of 400 knots. The aircraft entered the airspace over the territorial waters of Qatar at coordinates 255841N/0505042E and continued on its way for 2.5 knots. It then proceeded to fly in circles before leaving at 1821 hours at coordinates 255711N/0505000E. The competent Qatari authorities quickly ordered an aerial patrol of that area, and an aircraft was scrambled immediately.

This air violation constitutes a serious and flagrant breach of international law. Moreover, these repeated violations of the sovereignty of Qatar heighten tensions in the region and are being committed without any regard for regional security and stability. Acting on the basis of Articles 34 and 35 of the Charter of the United Nations, Qatar once more draws the attention of the Security Council to this serious incident and calls upon the Organization yet again to take the measures required under the Charter to maintain international peace and security, and put an end to the repeated violations committed by Bahrain.

Qatar continues to pursue a policy of self-restraint in response to the irresponsible and provocative actions that have been taken against it, including by Bahrain, and that are aimed at undermining regional security and stability. Qatar strongly condemns and rejects any violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and reserves its full right to respond to any violations, as is its inherent sovereign right. Moreover, Qatar will not hesitate to take the measures required to defend its sovereignty, borders, airspace, maritime space and national security, in accordance with international law and norms.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Alya Ahmed Saif **Al-Thani**
Permanent Representative

18-05108 (E) 040418 050418

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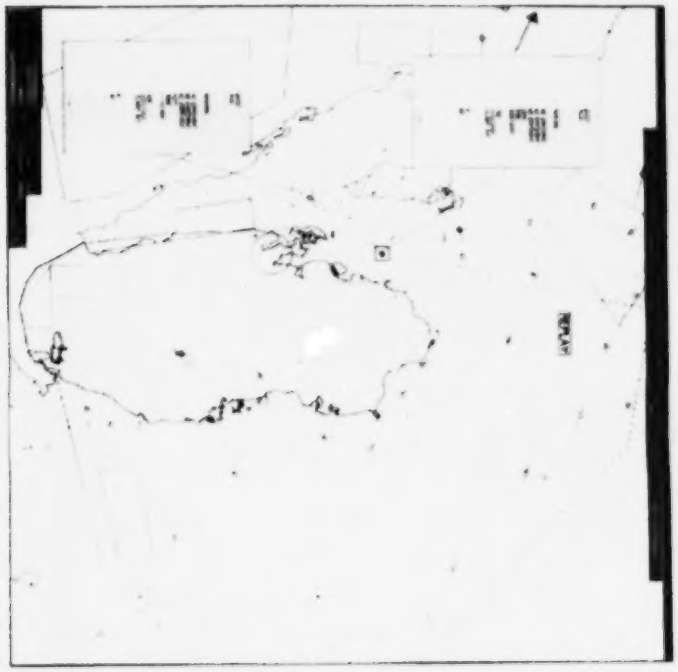
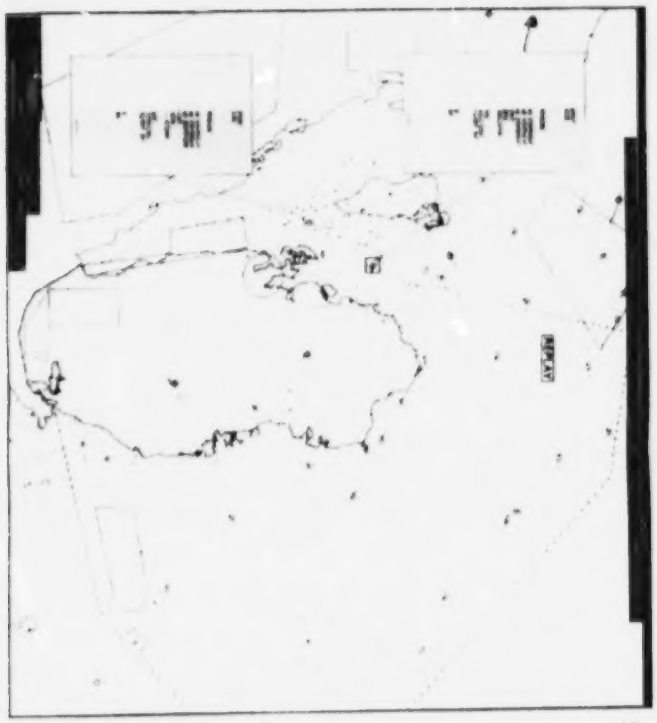
Annex to the identical letters dated 27 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

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البحرينية
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الطائرة المقاتلة
البحرينية

United Nations S/2018/270

Security Council

Distr.: General
28 March 2018
English
Original: Arabic

Letter dated 26 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I am writing in response to the letter dated 9 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/215). The Arab Republic of Egypt finds it deplorable that the Sudan should repeatedly seek to use the Security Council as a forum in which to promote its false claims about Egypt. The above-mentioned letter is the most clear-cut example of the efforts of the Sudan to do just that.

Egypt reaffirms that conducting polling in the Hala'ib electoral district for the presidential election is not something that is unprecedented. In fact, it is something that is quite normal given that all territory north of the 22nd parallel of latitude north falls within one of the electoral districts of Egypt. Polling takes place in that territory for presidential, parliamentary and local elections, as well as for public referendums, in accordance with the Egyptian Constitution and the relevant laws. All the measures that are being taken by the Egyptian authorities in Hala'ib and Shalatin are consistent with the exercise of their inherent powers and the fulfilment of their responsibility to develop every region of the country and serve the interests of all Egyptian citizens.

We shall not address the claims set out in the above-mentioned letter of the Sudan, because we have responded to and refuted each and every one of them in the relevant letters that the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations has addressed to the President of the Security Council, the most recent of which was the letter dated 19 March 2018 (S/2018/258). In all those letters, we have reaffirmed that the international border between Egypt and the Sudan runs along the 22nd parallel of latitude north. This fact is based on a clear and well-established legal basis, namely, the agreement that was concluded in January 1899 between the Government of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and His Highness the Khedive of Egypt. It is well-established that Egypt has sovereignty and jurisdiction over its land and maritime territory north of that line, and that the territory of the Sudan includes those lands that are to the south of the 22nd parallel of latitude north.

The Arab Republic of Egypt hereby declares that it rejects and does not recognize any action that the Sudan has taken, or might take in the future, to suggest that it has territorial rights north of the 22nd parallel of latitude north. Moreover, it considers any such action to be a breach by the Sudan of its international obligations, for which it can be held internationally responsible.

Egypt once again draws attention to the repeated efforts of the Sudan to occupy the Security Council with false claims and notes that the practice of the Sudan is at

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odds with the ongoing efforts of Egypt to bolster and develop relations between our fraternal countries and peoples.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mohamed Fathi Ahmed **Edrees**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

United Nations S/2018/271

Security Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2018
English
Original: Russian

Letter dated 27 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith an information bulletin dated 27 March 2018 from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Nebenzia**

18-05045 (E) 290318 030418

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Annex to the letter dated 27 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (27 March 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 14 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 6 in Damascus, 5 in Ladhiqiyah and 3 in Aleppo.

The Turkish representative office has reported five incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: two in Dar'a, two in Idlib and one in Damascus.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,778 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,500 tons.

One United Nations humanitarian convoy — comprising 19 refrigerated trucks — was assured passage to Tayyibah in Dar'a Governorate. The total weight of cargo delivered was 123 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 83 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 75,108 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

Over the past 24 hours, one ceasefire agreement has been signed with Magharat al-Shibli in Aleppo Governorate.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process has increased to 2,454.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/272

Security Council

Distr.: General
28 March 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 27 March 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution 2402 (2018) of 26 February 2018, by which the Council decided to extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Yemen until 28 March 2019.

Accordingly, I wish to inform you that, after consulting with the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), I have appointed the following experts:

Fernando Carvajal (Mexico), regional
Wolf-Christian Paes (Germany), arms
Marie-Louise Tougas (Canada), international humanitarian law

Two additional experts will be appointed shortly.

I should be grateful if you would bring this matter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

18-04937 (E) 290318

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United Nations S/2018/273

Security Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2018

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2364 (2017), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) until 30 June 2018 and requested me to report on a quarterly basis on its implementation, focusing on progress in taking forward the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (see S/2015/364 and S/2015/364/Add.1) and the efforts of MINUSMA to support it.

II. Major political developments

2. On 30 December, the President of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, appointed Soumeylou Boubèye Maiga as Prime Minister. On 16 January, the signatory parties agreed on a timeline to accelerate the implementation of key provisions of the Agreement ahead of the presidential elections in July, but progress towards implementation has remained slow. Meanwhile, the newly appointed Government has been working with stakeholders, including the signatory armed groups, to foster conditions conducive to the holding of peaceful, credible and transparent elections throughout the country. The 24th session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee was postponed to allow time for the Malian parties to finalize their discussion on an agreement detailing the activities to be carried out before and after the presidential elections. Significant progress was made towards the operationalization of the joint force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), for which more than €400 million has now been pledged, including the sum raised at the International High-Level Conference on the Sahel, held in Brussels on 23 February.

3. During the reporting period, some progress was achieved on the benchmarks developed by the Government of Mali and MINUSMA for monitoring the implementation of the Agreement, notably on defence and security, political and institutional matters and humanitarian and development measures. Achievements include the adoption of laws establishing territorial communities in the regions of Ménaka and Taoudenni, progress in the devolution of competencies and resources to the regions and the securing of additional funds for the United Nations trust fund for peace and security in Mali. The drafting of the national strategy on security sector reform is ongoing. No significant progress was made on the justice and reconciliation indicators. Slight progress was registered on the justice indicators relating to the prosecution of terrorism and prison security. A detailed matrix of the benchmarks is available on the Mission's website (https://minusma.unmissions.org/matrices).

18-04383 (E) 020418

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A. Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali

4. During its regular session on 16 January, the Agreement Monitoring Committee endorsed a timeline, developed by the signatory parties with the support of MINUSMA, to accelerate the implementation of key provisions of the Agreement, focusing on measures related to: (a) decentralization, involving the harmonization of laws on territorial communities with the provisions of the Agreement; (b) defence and security, including mixed patrols, security sector reform and securing the upcoming elections; and (c) socioeconomic development. The Malian parties established ad hoc commissions to advance the implementation of the Agreement in all three areas.

5. For the first time since its designation as independent observer, the Carter Center attended the session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee on 16 January and stated its commitment to upholding independence and impartiality in carrying out its mandate. From 22 to 24 January, the delegation of the Carter Center visited Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, and held meetings with State representatives, interim authorities and civil society.

Political and institutional measures

6. On 30 December, the President appointed Soumeylou Boubèye Maiga as Prime Minister. He is the fifth Prime Minister to be appointed during the President's mandate. On the same day, a new Cabinet was named. With 9 women out of its 36 members, it continues to fall short of the 30 per cent quota for the representation of women required by the law of 18 December 2015. In a bid to reinforce the decentralization process, two new ministries, the Ministry of Territorial Communities and the Ministry of Local Development, were created to work in conjunction with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization.

7. Shortly after his nomination, the new Prime Minister reached out to the signatory armed groups with a view to reinvigorating the implementation of the peace process and to the majority and opposition political parties, religious leaders and trade unions to reinforce the social dialogue. On 13 and 14 January, he travelled to Algeria to discuss the peace process and bilateral cooperation with the President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and the Prime Minister, Ahmed Ouyahia. On 11 February, he travelled to Mopti where he announced measures to restore State authority and deliver peace dividends to the people.

8. On 31 December, the President announced that his Government would draft a law of national understanding, which would offer amnesty to individuals who had been involved in an armed rebellion, but who had not been not accused of violent crimes. On 5 March, human rights groups published an open letter calling on the Government to put the law on hold pending the conduct of impartial investigations into human rights abuses committed since 2012. On 6 March, the Prime Minister received a draft law, which would be considered by the National Assembly in April.

9. Extensive government consultations on a decree to be adopted by the Council of Ministers on the transfer of authority for the delivery of services and associated financial resources to regional authorities are ongoing with the signatory armed groups and other key stakeholders. While this decree will facilitate the decentralization process, interim authorities are still facing significant technical, infrastructural and logistical challenges, and additional funds need to be mobilized for the implementation of their priority action plans. On 9 and 10 February in Taoudenni and from 27 February to 1 March in Kidal, the Mission and the United Nations Development Programme provided training to representatives of the interim authorities, government officials and civil society representatives on the management

of administrative and financial issues, as well as on procurement and project management.

10. The number of State officials redeployed to the northern and central regions decreased by 6 per cent during the reporting period. As at 1 March, only 22 per cent of State officials were present at their duty stations in the northern regions and in Mopti Region. The governors of all the northern regions have been deployed to their respective duty stations, except the governor of Taoudenni, who continues to work from Timbuktu.

11. Since the previous reporting period, there has been a slight decrease in the redeployment of judicial and prison officials to northern and central Mali. As at 10 March, only 69 per cent of judicial officials and 37 per cent of penitentiary officials in the northern regions, and 96 per cent of judicial officials and 92 per cent of penitentiary officials in Mopti Region, were present at their assigned posts. The deteriorating security situation resulted in 6.5 per cent of appointed officials remaining in another jurisdiction and both a slight increase in absenteeism and a slight decrease in activities such as court hearings.

12. Regional, district and municipal elections are scheduled to be held in April, presidential elections in July and August and legislative elections in November and December. In this context, my Special Representative held a number of meetings with key figures in Malian politics, the political opposition, civil society and the signatory groups, urging restraint and dialogue in support of the electoral process. In addition, the Mission organized workshops aimed at preventing and mitigating potential election-related violence that could stem from growing insecurity, intercommunity tensions and limited State presence in Bamako, Gao, Kidal, Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu, benefiting over 600 national stakeholders, 40 per cent of whom were women. It also facilitated the training of 703 elections mediators, including 225 women, who will serve as members of community-based mediation panels.

Defence and security measures

13. The signatory parties agreed on integration criteria and quotas for internal security institutions and the civil service, but continue to diverge on quotas for the Malian armed forces and on a long-term vision of the security sector reform. The full operationalization of the mixed units of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Kidal and Timbuktu will be the first phase in the reconstitution and redeployment of Malian defence and security forces in the northern regions.

14. On 28 February, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process saw some progress with the beginning of the pre-registration phase for the identification and listing of all eligible combatants of the signatory movements by the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, in collaboration with MINUSMA. At the meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee held on 15 and 16 January, all parties agreed to complete the pre-registration within two months.

15. On 7 March, the National Assembly approved the national border policy and action plan. In parallel, the Security Sector Reform Commissariat developed its work plan for 2018 and is currently working with the National Council for Security Sector Reform to develop a national security sector reform strategy for the coming years. MINUSMA continues to assist the General Directorate of Territorial Communities in the development of regulations for the territorial police.

16. MINUSMA completed the rehabilitation of the camps of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Kidal and Timbuktu through infrastructure enhancements and security improvements. While the Mission stands ready to provide logistical support for the launch of mixed patrols in Kidal and Timbuktu, the operationalization

of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in both locations is still pending owing to disagreements between the signatory armed groups on the modalities.

17. To limit the recruitment of at-risk youth and combatants who are not eligible to participate in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the Mission implemented 17 ongoing community violence reduction projects, including vocational training and infrastructure rehabilitation, during the reporting period in Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu, Ménaka, Taoudenni and Mopti Regions. An evaluation of the 89 completed projects in the same regions showed that they had a positive impact on intercommunity reconciliation and provided direct socioeconomic benefits to 237,822 beneficiaries, including 114,263 women.

18. From 15 to 27 January, MINUSMA conducted Operation Furaji in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger to protect civilians and prevent the return of armed elements to inhabited areas. The operation involved human rights monitoring, reconnaissance, patrolling, medical and veterinary outreach activities and engagement with community leaders. MINUSMA conducted Operation Foronto from 4 to 15 March in the central region, with a focus on supporting the access of the MINUSMA civilian pillars to remote places like Dioura and Macina.

19. During the reporting period, the Mission conducted Operation Farrier to monitor and restrict the movements and equipment of the armed groups. The operation was part of the agreement by the Technical Commission on Security to enforce additional control measures for the signatory armed groups in order to ensure their compliance with the terms of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and reduce the free circulation of arms.

B. Support for the Malian defence and security forces

20. MINUSMA, in cooperation with other international partners, continued to support the Malian authorities' efforts to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime, including through technical assistance on evidence collection, crime scene management and mobile data analysis for the Malian Specialized Judicial Unit against Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime. For the first time since the operationalization of the unit, individuals charged with terrorism-related acts investigated by the unit were brought to trial before the Court of Appeal of Bamako, with four out of six defendants arrested in Mopti and Kidal Regions in 2015 and 2016 sentenced to prison terms and two acquitted. The United Nations is also finalizing a project aimed at improving the security conditions of detention for suspected terrorists and other high-risk detainees at the Bamako central prison.

21. In line with the memorandum of understanding between MINUSMA and the Government on the Mission's support for the Malian armed forces, the Mission provided three casualty and medical evacuations and conducted regular patrols with defence and security personnel. The Mission shared information with the Malian defence and security forces, within the limits of its mandate, specifically for the protection of civilians and for the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel. The Mission also began to revise the memorandum of understanding to include operational and technical aspects of support, in addition to capacity-building.

22. MINUSMA and partners trained 1,279 members, including 204 women, of the Malian security forces from Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Bamako on various policing modules and respecting human rights in countering terrorism. On 9 February, thanks to advocacy efforts by MINUSMA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Director General of the national police nominated 26 gender focal points for the country. On 16 March, MINUSMA completed an eight-month weapons and ammunition management training cycle,

through which 147 Malian defence and security forces were trained as ammunition depot and armoury storekeepers, inspectors and managers.

23. On 26 February, the President signed a decree approving the national policy and action plan on preventing and combating violent extremism and terrorism for 2018-2020, drafted with the support of the Mission, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. The Government has committed to funding 33 per cent of the priority projects for 2018, while advocacy efforts continue to mobilize the remaining funding requirements.

24. Since 16 December, the Mission has trained 87 Malian defence and security personnel in explosive-threat mitigation. The courses provide Malian forces with the skills required to plan and execute explosive ordnance disposal operations and to actively search for and detect improvised explosive devices.

C. Other political developments

25. On 24 December, the former President of Mali, Amadou Toumani Touré, returned for the first time to Mali from Senegal where he had been living in exile since 2012. The former President was welcomed in Bamako by the then Prime Minister, Abdoulaye Idrissa Maïga, other ministers and political party leaders. He has publicly stated that he does not intend to run for public office.

26. On 16 January, at the Mission's initiative, a delegation of women representing the signatory armed groups and civil society met with the president of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, the High Representative of the President for the peace process and MINUSMA to advocate their inclusion in the peace process. Engagement with the signatory parties is ongoing for women's inclusion in the mechanisms supporting the implementation of the Agreement.

27. The commissions established between the signatory movements during the talks in Anéfis in October 2017 held several meetings, but have yet to produce a tangible impact on the peace process. From 6 to 8 February, the signatory groups met in Amassine, Kidal Region, where they agreed to conduct joint patrols in Anéfis and Aguelhok.

28. The social climate remained calm throughout the reporting period, as the Government fostered a constructive dialogue with trade unions and civil society organizations, some of which had opposed the constitutional referendum.

29. On 29 January, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) concerning Mali adopted guidelines for the conduct of its work, in accordance with paragraph 9 (d) of the aforementioned resolution. During the Committee's first informal consultations, held on 5 February, the Panel of Experts on Mali was introduced to the Committee. The experts visited Mali in February.

D. Regional developments

30. During the reporting period, a number of high-level meetings sought to advance the operationalization and define the institutional framework of the G-5 Sahel joint force. Following a summit convened by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, in La Celle-Saint-Cloud, France, on 13 December to discuss financing modalities for the joint force, G-5 Sahel foreign affairs, defence and development ministers announced the creation of a G-5 Sahel trust fund in Bamako on 8 January. In addition, in resolution 2391 (2017), the Security Council noted with appreciation the proposal by the European Union to channel contributions to the force through its African Peace

Facility. The need for complementarity of funding mechanisms was emphasized during a meeting of G-5 Sahel defence ministers hosted by France on 15 January, while timelines for the deployment of the joint force were validated at the fourth summit of the G-5 Sahel Heads of State, held in Niamey on 6 February, which also saw the transfer of the G-5 Sahel presidency from Mali to the Niger.

31. Meanwhile, tripartite negotiations on United Nations support for the joint force, which were held in January and February in Niamey, Bamako and Nouakchott, concluded with the signing of a technical arrangement by the G-5 Sahel, the United Nations and the European Union on 23 February in the margins of the International High-Level Conference on the Sahel, organized by the European Union in Brussels. The technical arrangement outlines the modalities of the Mission's support, comprising medical and casualty evacuation and engineering and logistical support, at an estimated total cost of €44 million. A total of €414 million was pledged in support of the joint force, including pledges made during the conference in Brussels. Of the total, €10 million was contributed by the European Union through a separate financial agreement, also signed in Brussels, to provide for MINUSMA support for the joint force under the technical arrangement. G-5 Sahel member States committed to adopt a robust human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. They expressed concern, however, over the long-term sustainability and predictability of funding and reiterated their request to the Security Council to provide a mandate for the joint force under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

32. From mid to late January, the G-5 Sahel force led Operation Pagnali in central Mali. This operation targeted a terrorist cell along the border between Burkina Faso and Mali and reportedly resulted in neutralizing several terrorist elements.

33. The Mission remained an active participant in the Committee for Cooperation in Mali, a periodic conference convened by the commanders of the Malian armed forces, the G-5 Sahel force, Operation Barkhane and the European Union training mission to address operational coordination issues, share intelligence within respective mandates and harmonize plans.

III. Major security developments

34. The security situation worsened during the reporting period, and attacks against MINUSMA and the Malian defence and security forces intensified. The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims appears to have continued to improve its operational capacity and expand its area of operations, notably in the regions of Mopti and Ségou. An increase in the lethality of attacks was observed between 2016 and 2017. Indeed, while the number of attacks with improvised explosive devices remained relatively stable, with 139 incidents recorded in 2016 and 130 in 2017, the number of casualties increased substantially, from 70 killed and 184 injured in 2016 to 141 killed and 309 injured in 2017.

A. Asymmetric and other attacks

35. The security situation in northern and central Mali remains of grave concern. Mopti and Ségou Regions, together with Koulikoro Region, suffered as many attacks as the five northern regions combined. A series of attacks in Ségou, Timbuktu and Ménaka Regions that resulted in dozens of deaths between 25 and 28 January led the President to declare three days of national mourning. The first of these attacks targeted the camp of the Malian armed forces near Diabali, Ségou Region. Attacks in the Nampala-Diabali area contributed to decreasing morale among the defence and security forces, demonstrations by soldiers' families protesting against their

redeployment to the camp and the desertion and subsequent arrest of 36 gendarmes on 17 January. These grave developments call into question the ability of the Government to protect the population and its armed forces in the area. The surge of Malian troops in central Mali announced by the Government on 11 February has not yet translated into an improvement in the security situation.

36. During the reporting period, terrorist groups conducted 63 attacks — 37 against the Malian defence and security forces, 20 against MINUSMA, 5 against a signatory armed group and 3 against Operation Barkhane (some attacks involved more than one target) — in comparison with 71 attacks during the previous reporting period. The highest number of attacks was carried out in Mopti Region (24), followed by Kidal (16), Gao (8), Timbuktu (5), Ségou (4), Ménaka (3) and Koulikoro (3). The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims was particularly active in Gao, Kidal and Ménaka Regions and claimed responsibility for most of the attacks conducted during the reporting period. There were fewer casualties: 4 peacekeepers were killed and 12 were injured, and 1 MINUSMA contractor was killed (none were injured), whereas in the previous reporting period 11 peacekeepers had been killed and 44 injured. Of the personnel in the Operation Barkhane forces, two were killed and four were injured in the current reporting period, while three had been injured in the previous period.

37. Malian forces were the most heavily targeted and saw an increase in the number of victims: 45 soldiers were killed and 80 injured, compared with 23 killed and 8 injured in the previous period. Attacks against the Malian security and defence forces were most heavily concentrated in Mopti (17), followed by Gao (5), Ségou (4), Timbuktu (3), Koulikoro (2) and Ménaka (2). The attacks most often involved small arms fire, but also improvised explosive devices or mines, or a combination of small arms fire and explosive devices (complex attacks). In addition, 20 members of the signatory armed groups were killed and 12 were injured in terrorist attacks, whereas during the previous reporting period, 2 members of the signatory armed groups had been killed and there had been no reported injuries.

38. On 1 February, the Malian military Chief of Staff signed a military order prohibiting the circulation of motorcycles and pick-up trucks in 12 districts located in Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu Regions. The measure aims at improving security, and ultimately ensuring the free circulation of people and merchandise. On 6 February, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) issued a communiqué denouncing this measure, arguing that the ban was having a heavy impact on the livelihood of local populations. The order, initially applicable only to Niafunké district in Timbuktu Region, was later adopted by the Governor of Timbuktu on 21 February and extended to the other cities in the region as of 1 March.

39. The most active terrorist groups during the reporting period were Islamic State in the Greater Sahara on the border with the Niger and the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims in central Mali and on the borders with Mauritania and Burkina Faso. The latter remained active on social media and claimed responsibility for at least seven attacks perpetrated in January 2018 against MINUSMA, the Malian defence and security forces and the police of Burkina Faso. There were also growing concerns over cooperation between the two groups. On 15 January, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara issued a threat that they would work jointly with Al-Qaida to counter the deployment of the G-5 Sahel joint force.

B. Protection of civilians

40. In the centre of Mali, the protective environment further deteriorated over the reporting period. The expansion of the presence of radical groups facilitated their campaign of intimidation, targeted kidnappings and assassinations. They fuelled

intercommunity tensions and violence, notably between Fulani and Dogon, while their attacks against national and international forces resulted in an unprecedented number of civilian casualties.

41. As many as 71 civilians were killed and 22 were wounded in targeted attacks and intercommunity conflicts during the reporting period. While all districts of Mopti Region were affected, about a third of the casualties were recorded in Douentza district, where the targeted killing of a Dogon Qur'anic teacher in Mondoro commune on 30 December sparked a series of violent events. The most lethal incidents occurred on 15 January, when up to 12 members of the Dogon community were killed, and on 17 January, when eight members of the Fulani community were killed in Dogon-led reprisals. While Malian security forces had arrested a number of Fulani individuals following the assassinations of Dogon community members, they reportedly did not attempt to stop the subsequent arson of Fulani homes.

42. During the reporting period, the regional reconciliation teams, established by the Ministry of National Reconciliation, began operating. The Mopti team facilitated a local reconciliation process, with the support of an international non-governmental organization and of a local reconciliation commission. It also organized intercommunity meetings in areas that had been affected by heavy violence in June 2017 and January 2018, respectively. In January, MINUSMA carried out two missions to Djenné district to assess the situation, appease tensions and liaise with stakeholders on the ground following repeated incursions by radical armed elements.

43. Five incidents involving improvised explosive devices in Mopti Region caused the deaths of 36 civilians and wounded 18 others, including on 25 January when a civilian vehicle hit such a device in Douentza district, killing all 26 passengers aboard. Malian forces were probably the target of three of these incidents, while MINUSMA troops were the likely target on 25 January, as their convoy was expected to pass along the same route. Five days earlier the quick-reaction force had defused an improvised explosive device in the same area, been ambushed and arrested 13 suspected assailants who were handed over to the Malian defence and security forces. In addition, three direct fire attacks against Malian forces wounded five civilians in Mopti and Youwarou districts.

44. In Timbuktu Region, instances of intimidation of civilians by radical elements were reported in Niafunké and Goundam districts. Following inter- and intracommunity tensions linked to longstanding land disputes in Alafia and Lafia communes, MINUSMA worked closely with national authorities and humanitarian partners, including through joint civilian missions to a disputed island (Iloa) and to Houndou Bongo Koyna, where displaced people from the island had moved. Reports of banditry, especially on the Timbuktu-Douentza axis, flowed in steadily. From 15 to 29 January, as part of Operation Furaji, the MINUSMA force carried out patrols to deter banditry in the area.

45. In Ménaka Region, MINUSMA contributed to the establishment of coordinated patrols, including all the signatory and splinter armed groups present in the area. These coordinated patrols have played an important role in building confidence between armed groups and have decreased the reported incidence of armed banditry and other types of violence that affect civilians in the city. South of Ménaka and along the border with the Niger, incursions by armed elements and operations by Operation Barkhane reportedly led to civilian displacement. Severe access constraints hindered both situational awareness and MINUSMA action.

IV. Human rights situation

46. During the reporting period, MINUSMA documented 133 cases of human rights violations and abuses, involving at least 483 victims, compared with 170 cases and 326 victims in the previous reporting period. There were, inter alia, 18 cases of extrajudicial execution or other arbitrary killing, 18 cases of abduction or enforced disappearance, 6 cases of torture or ill-treatment and 18 cases of unlawful detention. Malian defence and security forces were involved in 33 violations (25 per cent of all cases). Signatory groups (55 cases), non-signatory or splinter groups (6 cases), and violent extremist groups (37 cases) were responsible for a total of 98 cases (74 per cent of all cases reported).

47. Nearly two thirds of cases occurred in Mopti and Ségou Regions (38 per cent) and Timbuktu Region (25 per cent), followed by Bamako district (16 per cent) and Gao Region (14 per cent); other regions accounted for less than 7 per cent of the remaining cases. Civilian State representatives and local notabilities accused of being close to Malian defence and security forces were victims of at least three killings and eight abductions by elements affiliated with the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims and other groups affiliated to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.

48. Counter-terrorism operations continued to raise grave human rights concerns. On 21 February, in the context of Operation Dambe, Malian armed forces arbitrarily arrested at least 10 civilians in Sokolo and Dioura communes, Ségou Region, 7 of whom were summarily executed, and 3 of whom remain missing. In a 27 February communiqué, the Government acknowledged that civilians had been killed during the operation, and vowed to conduct an investigation and to uphold human rights and humanitarian law standards. During the reporting period, the Malian authorities arrested 116 individuals in connection with the conflict, of whom 80 were arrested on terrorism-related charges (all adult men). As at 28 February, 17 had been released. Among those arrested on terrorism-related charges during the reporting period, more than half were subjected to human rights violations: 15 persons were victims of extrajudicial execution or enforced disappearance, 14 of torture or ill-treatment, and 15 of illegal detention.

49. During the reporting period, 696 additional individuals provided statements to the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, bringing the total to 7,588 depositions since 3 January 2017. On 23 January, the International Commission of Inquiry on Mali was formally established. The Commission will investigate allegations of abuse and serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed between January 2012 and January 2018 and will submit its report to my office by January 2019.

50. On 1 February, MINUSMA published a report on human rights and the peace process. While focusing on 2016/17, the report captures patterns of human rights abuses that continue to this day, including the high number of cases of abuse by armed groups. The report was used by the Mission to discuss human rights and the fight against impunity with the authorities and the signatory movements.

51. On 14 February, MINUSMA held a workshop in Kidal with seven CMA focal points on conflict-related sexual violence to validate the CMA plan on prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence. The approved plan contains time-bound activities to be implemented by CMA, with MINUSMA support, including monitoring and reporting on the implementation process.

52. The country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 48 grave violations against children since 16 December. Seven children were killed and one was maimed in Mopti and Gao; two boys were separated from an unidentified armed group and are

following a reintegration program in Gao; at least seven children were abducted in two incidents; there were two cases of attacks against schools and hospitals; and 29 cases of denial of humanitarian access were verified. Advocacy efforts continued for the release of three children detained at a Government-run detention centre in Bamako. In addition, the task force is currently investigating allegations of five children reportedly killed by unidentified armed elements in Mopti Region.

53. On 21 December, the Mission and CMA agreed on a timeline of activities and an implementation strategy for the action plan to end and prevent grave violations against children. The Mission also continued its dialogue with the Platform coalition of armed groups to prevent and put an end to such violations.

V. Humanitarian situation

54. The humanitarian situation continued to worsen owing to insecurity in northern and central Mali and limited State presence. While the Humanitarian Response Plan 2018, launched in Bamako on 14 February, seeks to provide life-saving and protection assistance to 1.56 million people, as of 10 March, only 4 per cent of the $263 million required had been received. The $8 million made available through the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund for 2018 was allocated to life-saving activities in the sectors of food security, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene.

55. During the reporting period, 41 security incidents, mostly involving the break-in of compounds and vehicle thefts, affected humanitarian actors, compared with 27 cases in the previous reporting period. On 1 February, a humanitarian worker was shot and killed in Gao under circumstances that remain to be determined.

56. The already dire food and nutrition situation could deteriorate further owing to a looming agropastoral crisis. Insufficient rains in 2017 have affected the food security of people and livestock in the regions of Gao, Kayes, Mopti, Ségou and Sikasso. Across Mali, 4.1 million people are expected to be food insecure, of whom 800,000 are expected to need emergency food assistance, during the 2018 lean season (June to September).

57. As of January 2018, the Government had registered 47,700 internally displaced persons, 589,600 internally displaced and refugee returnees, and 554 asylum seekers from various countries, compared with 40,600 internally displaced persons, 577,438 returnees and 490 asylum seekers in November 2017. While Mali hosts 17,039 refugees from various countries, more than 131,800 Malian refugees remain in neighbouring countries.

58. On 1 February, the Government endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, expressing its support for the protection of education. However, insecurity continued to have a dramatic impact on the education system. As of March 2018, 715 schools were closed in Kidal, Gao, Ménaka, Timbuktu, Mopti and Ségou Regions owing to insecurity, including threats and attacks from violent extremists. As a result, 214,500 children were denied access to education.

59. The United Nations and its partners provided access to safe water for 22,800 people in Gao and Timbuktu Regions and treated more than 13,950 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. A total of 343 cases were recorded in the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System, of which 63 per cent were cases of sexual violence. Almost all survivors received medical and psychological support.

VI. Economic development and cultural preservation

60. The rate of economic growth in Mali fell slightly from 5.8 to 5.3 per cent between 2016 and 2017, owing to the persistent fragility of the security situation, political uncertainty and a drop in agricultural production caused by low rainfall in 2017. However, real GDP growth is expected to average 5 per cent in 2018–2019, driven by steady donor support and growth in public investment and agricultural production.

61. As part of a series of reforms undertaken by the West African Economic and Monetary Union to increase transparency, efficiency and accountability, in 2018 the Government switched to an outcome-driven budget regime. In the 2018 budget, grants from international institutions and foreign governments amount to $229 million, against $405 million in the 2017 revised budget law. As of February 2018, the Government had disbursed approximately $3 billion of the total of $4.24 billion pledged at the International Conference for the Economic Recovery and Development of Mali. On 30 January, the Parliament created the sustainable development fund to provide a guarantee for the specific strategy for the development of the northern regions.

62. In support of the Government's plan for securing the centre of the country, MINUSMA and the United Nations country team initiated several projects to promote social cohesion and support the return of State authority, economic recovery and the provision of basic social services, including through quick-impact projects. New contributions raised the amount in the trust fund for peace and security in Mali from $45.6 million to $62.5 million between September and the end of December 2017. The trust fund is used for key activities in support of peace and security in Mali, including the work of the independent observer.

63. The Peacebuilding Fund provided $3 million in financing for an initiative to promote community security and social cohesion in the Liptako-Gourma region straddling Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, where a large number of terrorist elements operate. Moreover, over $10 million was allocated to Peacebuilding Fund projects that will promote reconciliation, empower women and youth and prevent conflict in Ségou and Mopti Regions.

64. With regard to cultural preservation, MINUSMA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization continued to raise awareness of the protection of cultural heritage and efforts to combat illicit trafficking in cultural goods.

VII. Mission-wide strategic plan

65. The Mission increased its focus on activities related to its core mandated tasks, including support for the implementation of the Agreement, the restoration and extension of State authority and the Malian defence and security forces. The Mission was updating its strategic plan to reflect key elements that emerged from discussions with the United Nations country team as part of the ongoing strategic review, including the root causes and drivers of the conflict and scenarios for political and other developments in Mali within a two-year period. The strategic review aims to reassess United Nations engagement in the post-election environment in Mali on the basis of current trends in the political, security and operational environment and the effectiveness of the Mission in implementing its present mandate. The review is intended to inform the preparation of my next report to the Security Council and its deliberations on the renewal of the Mission's mandate in June.

VIII. Capacities of the Mission

A. Military

66. The authorized force level of up to 13,289 military personnel comprised 40 military observers, 421 staff officers and 12,828 contingent personnel. As at March, 11,795 personnel had been deployed, or 88.8 per cent of the authorized strength. Women accounted for 2.64 per cent of military personnel.

67. The implementation of the recommendations of the technical review conducted in July 2017 continued, including with progress on camp consolidation measures, the appointment of force protection officers and the finalization of plans to establish permanent medical treatment capabilities in the central region as part of the budget for year 2018/19. The Mission has also proposed that mobile training teams be set up to improve contingent performance.

68. The lack of contingent-owned armoured personnel carriers, including mine-protected vehicles, remained the most critical equipment shortfall. This gap has prevented the Mission from implementing fully a number of its operational tasks, such as patrolling and providing escorts for United Nations logistics convoys. Eight personnel carriers were damaged beyond repair during the reporting period and the number of available troop carriers is decreasing steadily owing to the limited ability of troop-contributing countries to maintain vehicles or replace destroyed vehicles. To address these challenges, two United Nations-owned mine-protected vehicles were loaned to the Bangladeshi infantry battalion to augment the unit's protective posture during operations, and training was provided to troop-contributing countries on the claims process to replace destroyed carriers.

69. The Mission considers the deployment of the quick-reaction force's remaining vehicles and aviation assets to be an immediate operational necessity. Failure to address the current shortfall in medium-utility helicopters in the centre, west, north and east (from June 2018) of the country will prevent the Mission from fully executing intelligence-driven, force-directed operations to locate and disrupt terrorist groups that are threatening civilians and United Nations and associated personnel and from contributing effectively to stabilization in the centre and north of Mali.

70. Combat convoy capabilities were strengthened towards the end of 2017 and, at time of writing the present report, the new arrivals were proceeding towards full operational capability. The first company and headquarters elements of the Egyptian convoy battalion arrived in late October 2017. Despite the initial challenges faced in carrying out autonomous convoys and escorts, the first convoy was conducted on 7 February with a reduced number of vehicles. The deployment of the Sri Lankan convoy company was completed on 12 January, and it reached full operational capability on 18 February. With two operational combat convoy companies, it is expected that MINUSMA will be able to free two infantry companies within one month.

B. Police

71. On 15 March, 1,737 personnel, or 90.5 per cent of the authorized strength, were deployed, with 306 (88.7 per cent) individual police officers, of whom 16.5 per cent were women, and 1,431 (90.9 per cent) formed police unit personnel, of whom 4.7 per cent were women. MINUSMA police continued to require 12 armoured personnel carriers for formed police units and 6 additional armoured vehicles for individual police officers. The Mission also requires individual police officers with specialized expertise, including in the fields of forensics, investigations, riverine police capacity,

security sector reform, counter-terrorism, serious organized crime, illicit trafficking, strategic planning and project management.

C. Civilian personnel

72. As of 12 March, 81 per cent of all MINUSMA civilian staff had been deployed, including 82 per cent of international staff, 83 per cent of United Nations Volunteers and 81 per cent of national staff. Women held 25 per cent of the international posts, 30 per cent of United Nations Volunteer positions and 19 per cent of national staff posts.

73. On 3 January, MINUSMA finalized an action plan on gender parity with a view to improving performance in recruiting and retaining women at the Mission, including through the establishment of a mentoring system.

D. Camp construction and securing supply routes

74. In Gao, 110 civilian staff and a Chinese force protection unit comprising 170 military personnel were relocated from Camp Elevage to the super camp, as per a recommendation of the board of inquiry following three separate attacks perpetrated against MINUSMA in Gao city on 31 May 2016.

75. As part of the consolidation of MINUSMA premises in Bamako, 314 personnel moved from the logistics base to the Mission operations base in late December 2017. The Mission saved approximately $81,000 per month in rent as a result of the move.

76. The rehabilitation of the Gao runway is 31 per cent completed and on track for the scheduled completion on 30 June 2018. Due to increased security threats in Diabali, Ségou Region, the Mission is improving its defence infrastructure for the MINUSMA camp.

E. Environment

77. As part of the implementation of its environmental action plan, MINUSMA ensured the proper collection and treatment of solid and biomedical waste in all deployment sites. It also continued efforts to improve wastewater management, including by commissioning wastewater treatment plants in Kidal, and conducted inspections in Gao, Bamako, Kidal and Aguelhok to monitor the Mission's environmental footprint.

IX. Safety and security of United Nations personnel

78. In response to the report issued in December 2017 by Lieutenant General (Retired) dos Santos Cruz, whom I appointed to lead a review on improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers, MINUSMA identified nine measures to improve the training and equipment of its troops and conveyed clear guidance on the need to adopt a more robust posture at all levels. Examples of those measures include ensuring that escort convoys are equipped with counter-improvised explosive device capabilities and that troops are provided with predeployment and in-mission training. In addition, MINUSMA has deployed early warning capabilities to the Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu camps and plans to also deploy these capabilities to the Mopti and Ménaka camps.

79. As the security situation remains a significant challenge for all United Nations personnel involved in programme delivery, the Mission continued to adjust its defensive plans to the elevated threat level, including through the reinforcement of camp perimeters and the construction of bunkers, observation posts and blast protection walls. Safe havens and bunkers were completed in the Gao camp, while the construction of overhead protection for sleeping units for camps in Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, Mopti and Tessalit is still in progress. The Mission initiated the construction of base defence operations centres to coordinate integrated defence procedures among the different components responsible for the camps' protection and is in the process of installing closed-circuit television systems throughout MINUSMA camps. In addition, MINUSMA provided training on improvised explosive device threat mitigation for 83 logistic convoy commanders.

80. Medical evacuation procedures were improved through the delegation of authority to the sectors to activate medical evacuation flights for pre-planned tactical and combat operations. However, aeromedical evacuation teams from Member States were still required for Ménaka and Tessalit, which were supported by teams from other locations. Improvements to airfield infrastructure to enhance medical evacuation capabilities at night continued to progress in Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal and Tessalit.

81. MINUSMA established a secure communication network to support the Mission's intelligence-related capacities in three locations with a planned expansion to two additional sector headquarters. Medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles were in operation in Timbuktu, providing information and analysis capability. As a complement to the camp surveillance system in Kidal, one tactical unmanned aerial vehicle was deployed to provide extended surveillance beyond the camp perimeter, complementing the closed-circuit television surveillance system currently being established in the main United Nations premises. The Mission's intelligence and information infrastructure is designed to increase awareness of and the early detection of threats to civilians and to ensure the protection of MINUSMA camps and associated personnel.

X. Conduct and discipline

82. During the reporting period, one allegation of sexual abuse was reported. MINUSMA referred the matter to the Office of Internal Oversight Services for investigation. Administrative measures were taken pending the outcome of the investigation. Two allegations received in 2017 are pending investigation by the relevant troop-contributing country and the Office of Internal Oversight Services. MINUSMA continued to combat sexual exploitation and abuse through enforcement measures, assistance to victims, training and outreach activities to inform personnel and the local population about the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

XI. Observations

83. Months before the holding of the presidential election on 29 July, I remain deeply concerned at the slow pace of implementation of the timeline adopted by the Agreement Monitoring Committee on 16 January, the deterioration in the extant security situation and its adverse impact on the elections, as well as on the operational environment of the Mission. Despite the importance of the elections scheduled thus far, the parties must not lose sight of their responsibilities vis-à-vis the implementation of the Agreement.

84. The appointment by President Keita of Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga as Prime Minister on 30 December has provided an opportunity to reinvigorate the peace process. I note the Prime Minister's initiative in adopting a road map to operationalize the timeline adopted on 16 January. The United Nations, including MINUSMA, and the international community will continue to support the parties in the implementation of key outstanding provisions of the Agreement. Progress in priority areas of the Agreement, including decentralization, security sector reform and cantonment, as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, will be crucial to advance the peace process. Short-term gains in these areas must be consolidated in support of the broader objectives of national reconciliation, economic development, good governance and the building of a resilient and inclusive society to pave way for sustainable peace in Mali. I call for the inclusion of women and young people in all the mechanisms supporting the implementation of the Agreement, as well as in the interim authorities.

85. The restoration and extension of State authority remain a priority for the effective protection of civilians and the delivery of long-awaited peace dividends to conflict-affected communities. I welcome the recent appointments of government officials, particularly prefects and sub-prefects for the northern and central regions. I exhort the Government to provide the newly appointed officials with appropriate resources to ensure their effective and rapid deployment to and establishment in their respective duty stations. The Government is also encouraged to fill the remaining vacant positions in the territorial administration, including by considering more women and candidates from various regions. MINUSMA will continue to support the redeployment and extension of the State, including through technical assistance and capacity-building. I appeal to the technical and financial partners of Mali to support this process.

86. I call on the Government, opposition political parties and the signatory armed groups to ensure that peaceful elections are held throughout Mali, including in the north. The Government's engagement with the signatory armed groups and efforts to strengthen dialogue with majority and opposition political parties will contribute to achieving this objective.

87. The United Nations will continue to support the reconciliation and justice measures of the Agreement, including the International Commission of Inquiry to investigate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed in Mali since January 2012. On 23 January, I appointed the three members of this Commission, established at the request of the parties, and look forward to its report.

88. The assumption of duty of the Carter Center as independent observer and its establishment of a presence office in Mali are welcome developments. I hope the forthcoming first report of the observer will help to reinvigorate the peace process and underline the parties' responsibilities.

89. The security situation, in particular acts of terrorism against innocent civilians, and its adverse impact on livelihoods, access to basic services and the delivery of humanitarian assistance and development programming, remains a source of deep concern. The deteriorating security situation in Mali continues to threaten regional stability in the Sahel. It is urgent to step up efforts to counter asymmetric threats, particularly improvised explosives devices or mines, which are killing an increased number of civilians. I strongly condemn the terrorist attack near the border with Burkina Faso on 26 January, which killed at least 26 persons, including women and children. I call on the Government to seek and bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts and express my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims as well as the Governments and peoples of the countries concerned. I note the visit of

the Panel of Experts of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) concerning Mali; the Council will consider the Panel's report in due course.

90. I equally remain deeply concerned about the situation in the central regions, where attacks and human rights violations persist. The increased presence of Malian defence and security forces in central Mali is essential to protecting the population, as well as promoting reconciliation among communities. In this regard, I welcome the visit of the Prime Minister to Mopti on 11 February and all the initiatives taken thus far to better coordinate activities and interventions in support of the Government's multidimensional and integrated strategy for the centre. The United Nations system in Mali and donors will continue to support this strategy, while MINUSMA pursues it efforts towards the full deployment of the Senegalese quick-reaction force.

91. I remain committed to supporting the G-5 Sahel joint force and urge Member States and international organizations to continue to contribute to the force's full operationalization. I commend the Member States who pledged to support the force at the International High-Level Conference on the Sahel, held in Brussels on 23 February, and invite them to release the funds pledged without delay. I welcome the conclusion of the technical agreement requested by the Security Council in resolution 2391 (2017). I look forward to presenting an update on the United Nations support for the G-5 Sahel joint force in my report that will be issued in May.

92. I welcome the growing ownership of security- and development-related initiatives taken by the G-5 Sahel. While I recognize the importance of conducting military operations against terrorist networks and organized criminals, including drug traffickers and people smugglers, the situation in the Sahel region merits a multidimensional approach that includes creating job opportunities for young people and ensuring accountability for serious crimes, such as terrorist acts, that destabilize the peace process.

93. MINUSMA peacekeepers continue to be targeted by attacks that are increasing in complexity and lethality. In this context, I note the importance of the comprehensive recommendations put forward in the report on improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers to reduce fatalities and injuries. The Secretariat has developed an action plan and stands ready to support MINUSMA, including by providing additional equipment and predeployment training. I am pleased to note that the Mission has started to implement the recommendations, including those of its military technical review. I urge Member States to also support the implementation of the report's recommendations.

94. I strongly encourage the Government to intensify its efforts to expand the delivery of basic social services in northern and central Mali and to advance gender equality. I commend the humanitarian actors who operate in a very challenging environment to assist people in need in Mali. I urge all the relevant parties to respect international humanitarian law, human rights law and the humanitarian principles, allow the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need and protect humanitarian workers and other civilians, especially children. I also urge international partners to fund the Humanitarian Response Plan 2018 to avoid a further deterioration of the situation.

95. The Mission's capability gaps continue to affect its operations and the safety and security of the personnel. Given the growing asymmetric threats in the operational environment, I call on troop- and police-contributing countries to provide their contingents with adequate predeployment training and equipment, including mine-protected vehicles, to mitigate the risks that they take to protect civilians, as well as to limit caveats with regard to their engagement and posture, in order to

strengthen integration and mutual protection. I call on Member States to continue to support United Nations peacekeeping, including through bilateral support to MINUSMA troop- and police-contributing countries.

96. Ahead of the renewal of the mandate of MINUSMA, I look forward to the outcome of the Mission's ongoing strategic review, which will help to redefine strategies to respond to the multiple challenges outlined herein.

97. Finally, I pay tribute to the men and women of MINUSMA, under the leadership of the Special Representative, Annadif Mahamat Saleh. The relentless efforts of the staff to support the peace process under extremely difficult conditions will bear fruit. I wish to express my gratitude to the international mediation team, including the lead mediator Algeria, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, the European Union, the G-5 Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States, non-governmental organizations and all other partners for their continued support towards the restoration of peace and stability in Mali.

Annex I

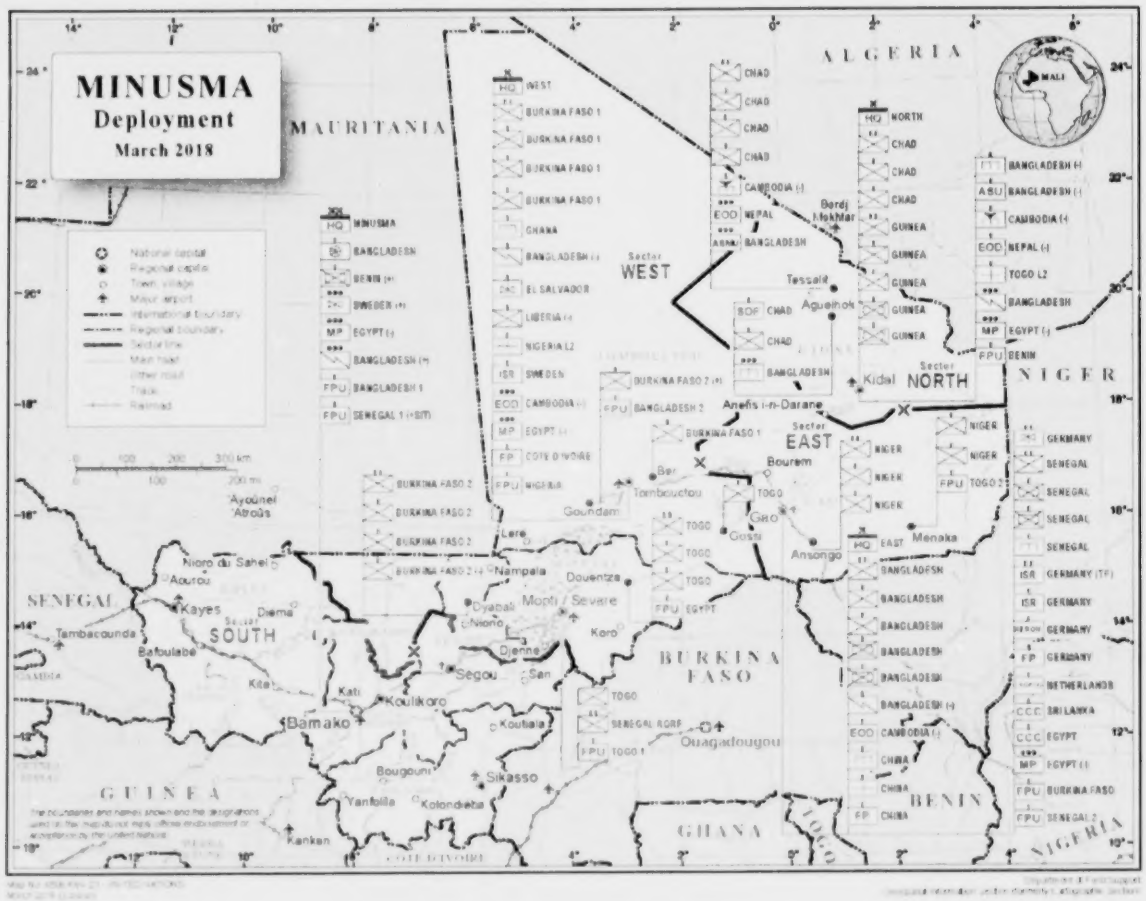
Military and police strength of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali as at 15 March 2018

	Military			*Police*								
	Staff officers and units			*Individual police officers*			*Formed police units*			*Total police*		
Country	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
Armenia	1		1									
Austria	2		2									
Bangladesh	1 381	14	1 395				279		279	279		279
Belgium	18	1	19									
Benin	258	2	260	21	2	23	140		140	161	2	163
Bhutan	4		4									
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2		2									
Burkina Faso	1 655	68	1 723	22	6	28	133	6	139	155	12	167
Burundi		1	1									
Cambodia	277	25	302									
Cameroon	2	1	3	13	4	17				13	4	17
Chad	1 446	2	1 448	14	5	19				14	5	19
China	389	14	403									
Côte d'Ivoire	154	4	158	13	4	17				13	4	17
Czechia	3	1	4									
Denmark	1		1									
Egypt	337		337	3		3	139		139	142		142
El Salvador	93	11	104									
Estonia	9		9									
Ethiopia	1		1									
Finland	5		5	5	1	6				5	1	6
France	25		25	6	1	7				6	1	7
Gambia	4		4									
Germany	544	15	559	9	2	11				9	2	11
Ghana	164		164									
Guatemala	2		2									
Guinea	852	11	863	13	12	25				13	12	25
Hungary				1		1				1		1
Indonesia	9		9									
Italy	1	1	2									
Jordan	9		9	9		9				9		9
Kenya	8	3	11									
Latvia	3		3									
Liberia	73	7	80									
Lithuania	5		5									
Madagascar				1		1				1		1

	Military			Police								
	Staff officers and units			Individual police officers			Formed police units			Total police		
Country	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Mauritania	6		6									
Nepal	147	4	151									
Netherlands	197	14	211	4	2	6				4	2	6
Niger	855	8	863	18	11	29				18	11	29
Nigeria	70	16	86	2	5	7	125	14	139	127	19	146
Norway	14	1	15									
Pakistan	2		2									
Portugal	2		2	1		1				1		1
Romania	1		1	6		6				6		6
Senegal	1 042	14	1 056	28		28	286	29	315	314	29	343
Sierra Leone	8	2	10									
Spain	1		1	2		2				2		2
Sri Lanka	207		207									
Sweden	257	31	288	2		2				2		2
Switzerland	4		4	3		3				3		3
Togo	900	39	939	13		13	262	18	280	275	18	293
Tunisia				36	2	38				36	2	38
Turkey				1		1				1		1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2		2									
United States of America	23	4	27									
Yemen	2		2	3		3				3		3
Total	**11 477**	**314**	**11 791**	**249**	**57**	**306**	**1364**	**67**	**1 431**	**1 613**	**124**	**1 737**

Annex II

Map


MINUSMA
Deployment
March 2018
MAURITANIA
ALGERIA
MALI
NIGER
BURKINA FASO
SENEGAL
GUINEA
BENIN
GHANA
NIGERIA
Sector WEST
Sector EAST
Sector NORTH
Sector SOUTH
Aguelhok
Tessalit
Kidal
Anefis i-n-Darane
Tombouctou
Goundam
Gossi
Ansongo
Menaka
Bourem
Mopti / Severe
Douentza
Koro
Djenne
Segou
Koutiala
Ouagadougou
Bamako
Kati
Koulikoro
Sikasso
Bougouni
Yanfolila
Kolondieba
Kayes
Nioro du Sahel
Aourou
Nampala
Dyabali
Nioro
Tambacounda
Kenkan

United Nations S/2018/274

Security Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2018

Original: English

Note verbale dated 28 March 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the United Nations has the honour to forward a copy of the letter from the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, addressed to the President of the Security Council (see annex).

The distribution of the present letter and its annex to all the members of the Security Council would be greatly appreciated.

18-05047 (E) 030418

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Annex to the note verbale dated 28 March 2018 from the Permanent Mission of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Belgrade, 28 March 2018

Excellency,

I wish to inform you about the terrifying events that took place in Kosovo and Metohija, southern Serbian province, on 26 March 2018.

Mr. Marko Djuric is the Chief of the team for negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina and Head of the negotiating group for Chapter 35 in Serbia's EU accession talks. In addition, Mr. Djuric is also Head of the Task Force for Support to Internal Dialogue on Kosovo and Metohija, which was initiated by H.E. Mr. Aleksandar Vucic, President of the Republic of Serbia, with a view to taking up all proposals that could help solve the Kosovo and Metohija issue and reach a compromise with the Albanian national minority living there.

Mr. Djuric has had regular meetings in Brussels with Albanian representatives from Kosovo and Metohija within the EU-facilitated dialogue. In the last 6 years he even met them every ten days, sometimes. He is a state official, known to everyone as a negotiator, a man who advocates dialogue, peace and problem resolution.

On the very day of 26 March, Mr. Djuric and his associates were in Kosovska Mitrovica, a town in northern part of the province, where he was supposed to have meetings with representatives of local Serbs within the framework of the internal dialogue. A non-violent event, held in a democratic atmosphere, before TV crews, with citizens discussing problems and proposals for solutions, was disrupted by masked members of the Kosovo Police special units, armed to their teeth with rifles and battle ammunition. They raided the building at which the consultations were taking place in the harshest possible way, using crude force, hitting unarmed people with rifle butts and barrels. Among the injured were officials of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, ministers of the provincial government in Kosovo and Metohija, members of the provincial Parliament and other citizens. A total of 36 people were injured. One Serb, the Minister of the provincial government, was hospitalized.

Mr. Djuric was severely beaten, arrested and taken to Pristina, where, handcuffed, he was taken out of the police vehicle while watched on by local Albanians who chanted abuse against him, and dragged a few hundred metres to the police station, which was done in contravention of the standard police procedure and which action, having in mind extremism among Albanians that existed in the province, brought his life in jeopardy.

Representatives of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo and Metohija, governed by the members of the Albanian minority, tried to justify this insane, undemocratic, brutal, irresponsible and unacceptable act, by refusal to grant the so-called permission for Mr. Djuric to visit the Province.

Such claims are untrue in many ways. First and foremost, no one needs any kind of permission, including Mr. Djuric, to stay in Kosovo and Metohija. In line with the Agreement on the Visits of the Officials, reached under the EU auspices, on 14 November 2014 and amended on 15 October 2016, the two sides must inform each other, within the proper timeframe (72 or 48 hours prior to the visit), that some official of either the state authorities of the Republic of Serbia or the provincial authorities from Pristina will travel and stay in Kosovo and Metohija or in some other part of Serbia. Pristina was duly notified about the arrival of Mr. Marko Djuric, much before

the deadline set by the Agreement. The notification had all prescribed elements and was even sent three times in the mentioned period.

One specific category of officials is subject to the simplified procedure of the other side and only logistic information is submitted for them. In line with the mentioned Agreement, the visits by such officials, and each side has one of those, should be made in a way of advancing the process of the normalization of relations or contributing to the overall work within the EU-facilitated dialogue. In that context, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Marko Djuric should be the one accorded special treatment and it was exactly him who was the victim of disregard not only for the Agreement on the visits of the officials, pursuant to which he duly notified his arrival to the province of which there is irrefutable evidence, but also of disregard for many other legal regulations. Beating up, arresting and mistreating the chief negotiator of the other side was unseen in modern history of negotiating and will serve as an example of inhuman, disrespectful and fraudulent conduct.

The Republic of Serbia was neither weakened nor insulted by this act because it knows who it is dealing with. However, the Republic of Serbia is shocked and worried by the lack of proper response on the part of the European Union to the shame of which is the harassment of the negotiator in the process where the EU acts as the facilitator and the mission of which (EULEX) located in Kosovo and Metohija should ensure the rule of law and proper conduct of Kosovo police. EULEX was not only an observer but also accomplice to this shameful incident. The Republic of Serbia is concerned that KFOR did not react either to the action by the special units of the Kosovo police, since it is the only legal and legitimate military presence in Kosovo and Metohija which should, in line with the reached agreements, prevent the special police units from even stepping in the north of the province where the said arrest took place. This apparently pre-planned terrifying provocation by Pristina unequivocally asserts the past positions of Serbia, expressed on many occasions, that aspirations by Pristina to change and expand the mandate of the so-called "Kosovo Security Forces" and start the process of their transformation into the "Kosovo Armed Forces", are absolutely inacceptable and it would further destabilize and undermine the security situation in the province.

The provocation by the Albanian political leaders, without the permission of whom the attack against peaceful citizens and their political leader would not have happened, has dealt a serious blow to the peace process and seriously threatens peace and security of not only Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija but of the entire region. If one state official of Serbian nationality could be brought into such jeopardy, then the non-Albanians of Kosovo and Metohija do not have many reasons to feel safe.

Although worrying about the peace in the entire Western Balkan region, the Republic of Serbia remains committed to a dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes. Even in this situation it demonstrated maturity and patience, though it could not be found fault with by anyone if it reacted in stronger terms. The Republic of Serbia remains resolute to protect Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija and will deem every armed attack against the citizens in the province as an attack against the state.

The Republic of Serbia is consistently and continuously advocating the respect of the principles of international law and legally binding UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999) under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. We recall that exactly in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1244 in force, Kosovo and Metohija is the territory of the Republic of Serbia under the UN interim administration as well as that the preservation of peace and security in the province falls within the competence of the international civil and security presence. All activities of the Republic of Serbia are a reflection of the efforts made to defend the authority of international law, the UN

Charter and the legally binding UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999) guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia. At the same time, they are also a reflection of a conviction in the context of non-acceptance of unilateralism as the way of solving any issue in the relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

We expect and ask of the United Nations, the EU, NATO and the OSCE to respect international law and agreements made when Serbia is concerned and to fulfil commitments undertaken and protect peaceful citizens from expulsion, persecution, intimidation and killing, and we warn that no one and specially not Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija can provoke and put to test the strength of Serbia.

We expect NATO/KFOR to abide by the powers vested in them under UNSC Resolution 1244 and the Military-Technical Agreement of 1999 with a view to preventing these and similar provocations by Pristina, as well as establishing peace, security and freedom of movement in Kosovo and Metohija. We expect, in particular, the representatives of the EU institutions and the member states to clearly and unequivocally condemn Pristina activities and call for the respect of the reached agreements and refrain from any further brutal provocations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(*Signed*) Ivica **Dačić**

United Nations S/2018/275

Security Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2018

Original: English

Identical letters dated 28 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I write to inform you of a dangerous effort by Palestinian leaders to create conflict by orchestrating a series of mass confrontations, specifically on the security fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel, to occur between 30 March and 15 May 2018. While the Palestinians are attempting to present these demonstrations as acts of "peaceful resistance", Hamas has invested approximately $10 million into this confrontation campaign and will pay Gazans to participate.

The provocative actions of Hamas to ignite violence serve only to distract the world from the terror organization's disastrous hegemony that has resulted in a deteriorating situation in Gaza. For over a decade, Hamas has ruled Gaza with an iron fist, diverting funds that should be spent on essential civilian infrastructure projects to finance its raging terror campaign. Furthermore, Hamas continues to endanger the civilians of Gaza, as it hides behind the same women and children it incites to participate in these violent demonstrations.

Simultaneously, the Palestinian Authority continues to suspend payments for electricity and salaries in Gaza and has threatened additional sanctions. Israel, on the other hand, continues to provide electrical power and water to, and for the entry of goods into, Gaza in coordination with international parties and accommodates Gazans seeking to enter Israel for medical treatment.

In the light of the Palestinians' organized provocation scheduled for the coming weeks, I reiterate the right of Israel to defend its sovereignty and protect its citizens.

Israel condemns the Palestinian leadership's dangerous attempt to inflame tensions and instigate violence and expects all United Nations personnel to refrain from planning, supporting or participating in these activities.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter distributed as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Danny **Danon**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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United Nations S/2018/276

Security Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2018
English
Original: Russian

Letter dated 28 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith an information bulletin dated 28 March 2018 from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Nebenzia**

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Annex to the letter dated 28 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (28 March 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 13 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 6 in Ladhiqiyah, 4 in Damascus, 2 in Aleppo and 1 in Homs.

The Turkish representative office has reported five incidents of gunfire in Idlib Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,778 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,500 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 156 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 75,264 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is unchanged — it is still 2,454.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/277

Security Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2018

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2351 (2017), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 April 2018 and requested me to provide a report to it on the situation in Western Sahara well before the end of the mandate period. It covers developments since the previous report (S/2017/307) and describes the situation on the ground, the status and progress of the political negotiations on Western Sahara, the implementation of resolution 2351 (2017) and the existing challenges to the Mission's operations and steps taken to address them.

2. On 16 August 2017, I announced my decision to appoint Horst Koehler (Germany) as my new Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, to replace Christopher Ross (United States of America), whose mandate ended on 30 April 2017. Mr. Koehler took up his functions on 8 September. On 1 December, I also announced the appointment of Colin Stewart (Canada) as my new Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, to succeed Kim Bolduc (Canada), who completed her assignment on 22 November.

II. Recent developments

3. The situation in Western Sahara, as far as MINURSO was able to observe, remained generally calm during the reporting period. However, tensions between the parties, including on the unresolved issues concerning Guerguerat, as well as security concerns, continued to characterize the operational environment and mandate implementation of MINURSO.

4. On 28 April 2017, Frente Polisario withdrew its armed elements from the buffer strip at Guerguerat, in the south of the Territory. MINURSO continued to maintain a day-time presence in the area to monitor developments, augmented as necessary by helicopter patrols. The Guerguerat area remained calm and free of the presence of elements of either party for the reporting period until late December, when a small group of Frente Polisario military briefly entered the buffer strip to deliver a message to MINURSO observers to the effect that Frente Polisario would be blocking a car rally scheduled to pass through the Territory to Mauritania. As of 4 January 2018, a small group of apparently unarmed Frente Polisario elements established what the Frente Polisario leadership described as a daylight-hour "monitoring post" inside the

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buffer strip, approximately 500 metres south-east of the MINURSO temporary observation post. At the time of reporting, the elements remain in the location during daylight hours. Frente Polisario assured MINURSO that the presence consists of unarmed civilian "police". On 24 January 2018, MINURSO was invited to observe that there were no weapons in their vehicle.

5. The Security Council, through operative paragraph 3 of its resolution 2351 (2017), recognized that the recent crisis in the buffer strip in Guerguerat raised fundamental questions related to the ceasefire and related agreements and encouraged me to explore ways in which such questions could be resolved. In this regard, the Secretariat sent notes verbales to Morocco and Frente Polisario on 2 June proposing to address these questions, including through the deployment of an expert mission to conduct in-depth consultations with the parties. The Secretariat also solicited information on the questions referred to in paragraph 3 of resolution 2351 (2017). The proposal was accepted by Frente Polisario in June. In August, Morocco responded that military agreement No. 1 remained viable and a guarantee for the preservation of the ceasefire. Therefore, it considered the proposed mission "untimely" and "inappropriate".

6. In a letter dated 9 December 2017, the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario, Brahim Ghali, protested inter alia that the crisis in Guerguerat had not been resolved, that no United Nations expert mission had been deployed and that no concrete action had been taken by the United Nations to implement the provisions of Security Council resolution 2351 (2017). He warned that Frente Polisario would not "accept the continuation of this state of affairs".

7. On 4 January 2018, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations addressed a letter to my Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, expressing concern over the developing situation in Guerguerat, stating that the Frente Polisario presence inside the buffer strip is of a military nature, thus constituting a violation of military agreement No. 1. The message was reiterated by the Moroccan authorities during several exchanges with my Personal Envoy and with my Under-Secretaries-General for Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Operations.

8. On 6 January, I expressed deep concern about recent increased tensions in Guerguerat, calling on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid escalating tensions. I also called for regular civilian and commercial traffic not to be obstructed and for no action to be taken that might constitute a change to the status quo of the buffer strip. In a letter addressed to the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario and dated 5 January, I requested that the parties refrain from actions that could undermine the efforts of my Personal Envoy to relaunch the political process, while also reiterating my commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

9. In a letter dated 7 January, the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario urged that the underlying causes of tensions in Guerguerat "be addressed effectively in the context of a comprehensive approach in which the full implementation of the mandate of MINURSO must take centre stage." He also recalled that the decision by Frente Polisario to withdraw its presence from Guerguerat in April 2017 was made to facilitate the efforts of the United Nations and would be reviewed in the light of the "commitments of all stakeholders". With regard to the passage of civilian traffic through the area, he lamented that this implied the expansion of Morocco "up to the border of a third country and the implicit recognition that the final status of the Territory has already been determined". In conclusion, the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario noted that Frente Polisario remained committed to engaging in substantive negotiations without preconditions and to cooperating fully with me and my Personal Envoy.

10. On 1 February, the Permanent Representative of Morocco, in a letter addressed to my Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, reiterated the concern of Morocco over the continued presence of Frente Polisario near Guerguerat. Morocco also underscored that the presence endangered the relaunch of the political process. On 5 February, the Moroccan Coordinator with MINURSO wrote to my Special Representative in the same vein, asking him to continue and intensify his engagement with Frente Polisario in order to obtain its immediate and unconditional withdrawal.

11. On 6 November, King Mohammed VI delivered an address to mark the forty-second anniversary of the Green March. He stated that Morocco remains committed to engaging in the political process in the current dynamic that I called for and to cooperating with my Personal Envoy. He indicated that the engagement of Morocco rested on four established principles: (a) rejection of any solution other than the full sovereignty of Morocco over Western Sahara and its autonomy proposal; (b) all parties shouldering their responsibility to find a final solution; (c) respect for the Security Council as the only international body tasked with overseeing the settlement process; and (d) rejection of any "obsolete proposals designed to divert the settlement process from the set terms of reference". Morocco would not sit by and wait for the desired solution to be found, but rather press ahead with its endeavours to promote development in "[its] southern regions", including enabling them to be a link between Morocco and countries further south in Africa. Media reported that Frente Polisario had denounced the speech as a "denial of Morocco's commitments under the peace process".

12. During the reporting period, public life in Laayoune, insofar as MINURSO was able to observe, remained mostly peaceful but marked by a number of demonstrations, which Frente Polisario claims were violently repressed by Moroccan security forces. Meanwhile, Moroccan investment in Western Sahara continued, and numerous projects were either implemented or announced. Frente Polisario has repeatedly protested illegal exploitation by Morocco of the natural resources of Western Sahara and the creation of a new status quo on the ground.

13. Public life in the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, remained peaceful and free of major incidents, although frustrations continued among refugees about the stalemate in the political process. A few sporadic demonstrations took place in the refugee camps, protesting, for example, water shortages in the Smara camp in May and electricity shortages in the Laayoune camp in January. A small protest was held in Rabouni, near Tindouf, in May against the decision by Frente Polisario to withdraw from Guerguerat, demanding that it be reconsidered. Frente Polisario officials confirmed to MINURSO that two small-scale drug-related security incidents took place in the Awsard and Smara camps. The steady decrease in humanitarian aid to the refugees remained of concern. Donor appeals were issued by the World Food Programme (WFP) and by the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Algeria, in May and October respectively. In July, heavy winds caused damage to over 100 household shelters and a number of education facilities in the Dakhla refugee camp, resulting in a small number of injuries.

14. Frente Polisario repeatedly raised concerns with MINURSO about the increased threat posed by illicit drug smuggling in Western Sahara, claiming that it originated from Morocco. In June, Frente Polisario announced the arrest of 19 Moroccan nationals on charges of drug trafficking. On 31 October, the 19 individuals were sentenced to up to 16 years' imprisonment. Frente Polisario informed MINURSO that they were being held in a detention facility in Tifariti.

15. The Moroccan authorities wrote to me on five occasions to, inter alia, express concern about the Frente Polisario being present and constructing sand walls in the

buffer strip near Guerguerat. The Permanent Representative of Morocco also wrote to me to reiterate that the Western Sahara conflict lies within the exclusive competency of the United Nations Security Council. He reiterated the categorical opposition of Morocco to any involvement of the African Union in the political process. In a letter dated 18 April 2017, the Permanent Representative described my previous report on Western Sahara (S/2017/307) as being not balanced and criticized certain omissions and shortcomings, in particular as they pertained to the human rights and humanitarian situation in the refugee camps near Tindouf and relations between MINURSO and Frente Polisario.

16. The Secretary-General of Frente Polisario wrote to me on 16 occasions, deploring what he described as Moroccan violations of human rights, such as the repression of peaceful demonstrations, the illegal detention of the co-defendants in the Gdeim Izik case and the death of one Gdeim Izik prisoner; provocative actions in the territorial waters off south-west Western Sahara; and the illegal exploitation of natural resources, including by declaring an exclusive economic zone in the waters adjacent to Western Sahara. He repeatedly called on the United Nations to institute a human rights monitoring mechanism, implement the 1991 Settlement Plan for Western Sahara, and to "protect the territorial integrity of the Non-Self-Governing Territory of Western Sahara." With respect to my previous report on Western Sahara, the representative of Frente Polisario in New York expressed concern that the characterization of Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory was cited as a Frente Polisario position, while it is the position of the United Nations General Assembly. He also criticized my repeated calls upon the Frente Polisario to withdraw from Guerguerat.

III. Political activities

17. The appointment of my Personal Envoy was welcomed by the parties and neighbouring States, who pledged to support his efforts. In New York, he held initial consultations with representatives of the parties, neighbouring States, members of the Security Council and the Group of Friends on Western Sahara, with a view to relaunching the political process in a new spirit, with a new dynamic and ultimately to achieving a just, durable and mutually acceptable solution to the conflict in Western Sahara which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

18. From 15 to 24 October, my Personal Envoy undertook his first visit to the region. He travelled to Rabat, Rabouni, Tindouf, Algiers and Nouakchott. The main objective of the visit was to engage with the parties and neighbouring States to understand their position, build trust and assess first-hand the situation on the ground. While all stakeholders reiterated long-held positions, I am encouraged that he was able to hold discussions at the highest level throughout the region.

19. In Rabat, my Personal Envoy was received by King Mohammed VI, the Prime Minister, Saadeddine Othmani, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Nasser Bourita. The King welcomed the appointment of my Personal Envoy and expressed his commitment to the negotiating process. The Prime Minister also expressed his support for the efforts of my Personal Envoy to resolve the conflict. Meanwhile, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Morocco reiterated his country's continued commitment to a political solution to the conflict which is based on the Moroccan autonomy initiative of 2007. He stressed that the resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara would require Algeria to take on a more important role.

20. In Rabouni, my Personal Envoy met with the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario, members of the Frente Polisario leadership, and representatives of women and youth. The Secretary-General of Frente Polisario reiterated the movement's unconditional commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, while highlighting the suffering of the Sahrawi people, in particular the youth and those living in refugee camps. He called on Morocco to return to the negotiation table without preconditions. During a visit to the Awsard refugee camp near Tindouf, my Personal Envoy witnessed the profound frustrations and emotions of a refugee population that continues to endure the consequences of a conflict that has lasted for far too long. The harsh conditions in the camps and the exasperation of many, in particular women and youth, at the lack of prospects for a better future were the enduring images that my Personal Envoy took away from the visit. While in Tindouf, my Personal Envoy was also able to meet with the civilian personnel and military observers of MINURSO and expressed his gratitude for their important work, which significantly contributes to creating an operating environment conducive to the negotiating process.

21. In Algiers, my Personal Envoy met with the President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the Prime Minister, Ahmed Ouyahia, and the Minister of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Abdelkader Messahel. The President emphasized his country's continued support for any peaceful resolution that was acceptable to the Frente Polisario and respected their right to self-determination. He called on my Personal Envoy to contribute to building trust among all the stakeholders. The Prime Minister conveyed a similar message. The Minister of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation emphasized the role of Algeria as a neighbouring State as well as his country's commitment to the principle of self-determination.

22. In Nouakchott, my Personal Envoy met with the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, the Prime Minister, Yahya Ould Hademine, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih. All interlocutors reiterated the long-standing position of Mauritania of "positive neutrality", as well as their willingness to fully support the efforts of my Personal Envoy.

23. Throughout the visit, my Personal Envoy underscored to all his interlocutors the need to work together in a spirit of compromise and realism and to relaunch the political process without preconditions. He called on them to show signs of good will that would demonstrate their commitment to finding a mutually acceptable solution. All stakeholders consulted during his first trip to the region were unanimous in deploring the lack of regional cooperation caused by the conflict over Western Sahara and the resulting loss of jobs, growth and opportunities for all the peoples in the Maghreb region.

24. On 22 November, my Personal Envoy briefed the Security Council in New York on his first visit to the region. He expressed cautious optimism, observing that he had witnessed a "certain yearning" for a solution among all interlocutors. He invited the Council to work with him in defining concrete next steps for the path forward and called on Council members to reflect in their own positions the new spirit that they called for. The Council expressed public support for my Personal Envoy, noting that his appointment and his visit to the region represented important contributions to creating the new dynamic necessary to advance the political process.

25. Since his briefing to the Council, my Personal Envoy has continued his dialogue with the leadership of the parties and neighbouring States. He also continued his consultations with the members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara, namely, France, the Russian Federation, Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States, as well as other interested stakeholders.

26. From 9 to 18 January, my Personal Envoy travelled to Addis Ababa, Brussels, Kigali, London and Paris to meet with government representatives and interlocutors of the African Union and the European Union, including the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini. In these discussions, the interlocutors pledged support to my Personal Envoy's efforts and acknowledged the lead of the United Nations in the process. My Personal Envoy highlighted the political, socioeconomic and security implications of the Western Sahara conflict on regional integration. On 6 February, my Personal Envoy travelled to Geneva to meet with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to discuss humanitarian assistance for Sahrawi refugees in the camps near Tindouf.

27. On 14 December, in substantively identical letters, my Personal Envoy extended invitations to the parties to the conflict and the neighbouring States to hold bilateral in-depth consultations. They all responded positively to the invitation.

28. Thus, on 25 and 26 January, my Personal Envoy met the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario in Berlin. Consultations addressed in depth the political, socioeconomic and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict and the situation on both sides of the berm. The meetings were also an opportunity to assess the political process to date and to discuss new ideas for the way forward. On 6 March, my Personal Envoy held consultations with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Morocco in Lisbon, which included a discussion of my Personal Envoy's activities of recent months, an exchange of views on potential ways to structure future talks and on recent political developments. The Minister reiterated the willingness of Morocco to work with my Envoy and publicly called the consultations "rich and fruitful".

29. On 8 February, my Personal Envoy met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania in Berlin. The Minister emphasized the importance of preserving the good relations of Mauritania with all its neighbours, as well as his country's willingness to support the United Nations-led facilitation process. On 15 February, my Personal Envoy met with the Minister of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Algeria in Berlin. The Minister stressed the willingness of Algeria to support the political process in its capacity as neighbouring country, while also stressing the importance of respecting the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination.

30. I am encouraged by the positive responses by the representatives of the parties and neighbouring States, for holding consultations in an open and frank atmosphere that allowed my Personal Envoy to further explore their positions, as well as potential ways to structure future talks.

31. On 21 March, my Personal Envoy briefed the Security Council, pursuant to paragraph 11 of resolution 2351 (2017). The Council expressed full support for the efforts of my Personal Envoy.

IV. Activities of MINURSO

A. Operational activities

32. As at 1 March 2018, the military component of MINURSO consisted of 225 personnel, 14 of whom were female, against the authorized strength of 246. MINURSO continued to encourage troop-contributing countries to seek greater gender balance. From 1 April 2017 to 1 March 2018, MINURSO conducted

approximately 799,085 kilometres of ground patrols and 679 air patrols. Cooperation between MINURSO team site commanders and the parties was generally satisfactory. The reporting period included monthly visits to approximately 920 units, headquarters and strongpoints and 28 training areas. Military observers also visited 365 observation posts east and west of the berm and monitored over 292 notified operational activities by both parties. MINURSO continued to maintain the temporary observation post in Guerguerat established in August 2016, comprising 10 military observers, 1 doctor and one paramedic, assigned to monitor activities during daylight hours.

33. As of 1 July, owing to a direct threat of kidnapping against international personnel received in late June, patrolling east of the berm was restricted to a 100-kilometre radius from team sites. Normal patrolling activities continued west of the berm. Night operations on both sides of the berm remained suspended. MINURSO also immediately implemented additional precautionary measures and accelerated the reinforcement of the physical and operational security infrastructure at all nine team sites. In its 2018–2019 budget submitted to the General Assembly (A/72/731), the Mission proposed the acquisition of protective bunkers for all team sites east of the berm.

34. In late December, Frente Polisario elements reappeared inside the buffer strip near Guerguerat (see para. 4). Initially, Frente Polisario indicated that the presence was associated with the Africa Eco Race, an off-road automobile rally, which was to pass through the area on 8 January. Frente Polisario stated that it would block the race, and on 4 January stopped and briefly delayed some civilian traffic, with a few vehicles turning back. They subsequently clarified that they would not interfere with the race, but only observe it as its passed through, which they did. MINURSO encouraged Frente Polisario to withdraw from the area.

35. Morocco strongly objected to the Frente Polisario presence. On 4 January, MINURSO received advance notification by Morocco of the redeployment of 260 troops from Awsard to Bir Gandouz, about two hours from Guerguerat, to secure the race if necessary. On 9 January, MINURSO was informed of the troops' return to their initial location. MINURSO maintained dialogue with both parties and increased air patrols and the hours of operation of the temporary observation post in the area.

36. As at 1 March, Frente Polisario elements were still present in the Guerguerat area. MINURSO military observers continued to observe the situation during daylight hours.

37. During the reporting period, MINURSO recorded five violations of military agreement No. 1 by the Royal Moroccan Army in addition to 10 long-standing violations (see S/2017/307, para. 36). Two of them were general and three consisted of tactical reinforcements. The Royal Moroccan Army did not commit any freedom of movement violations during the reporting period.

38. Meanwhile, MINURSO recorded seven violations of military agreement No. 1 by Frente Polisario, as well as five general and two freedom of movement violations. These violations were in addition to the three long-standing violations referred to in the previous report (see S/2017/307, para. 37).

39. In October and January, the Royal Moroccan Army complained to MINURSO about two alleged night-time shooting incidents in subsectors Tichla and Bir Gandouz, along the southern part of the berm, which it attributed to the Frente Polisario military. On each occasion, the Royal Moroccan Army alleged that one of its soldiers stationed at the berm was injured by gunfire emanating from the buffer strip, while investigating suspicious noises. Frente Polisario claimed no knowledge of either incident and informed MINURSO that it had no military forces present in

those areas when the incidents allegedly happened. As, owing to existing security restrictions, the Mission does not conduct night patrols, it was unable to independently verify the incident. The Permanent Representative of Morocco wrote to the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations to raise the issue, warning that Morocco would not tolerate such provocations in the future. MINURSO also observed six demonstrations by Sahrawi civilians inside the buffer strip close to the berm.[1] While such demonstrations were typically peaceful, on one occasion stones were thrown by the demonstrators towards the Royal Moroccan Army, stationed at the berm. The Royal Moroccan Army complained to MINURSO about the demonstrations, considering them provocations and in violation of the ceasefire agreements.

B. Mine action

40. Landmines and other explosive remnants of war continue to endanger the lives of MINURSO military observers, civilian personnel and logistical convoys. As at 1 March, 54 known cluster strike areas and 22 known minefields remained to be addressed east of the berm. Since its relocation on 1 September 2016, the MINURSO Mine Action Coordination Centre has operated from Tindouf, Algeria.

41. The Royal Moroccan Army reported that, from 1 April 2017 to 1 March 2018, four accidents related to landmines or explosive remnants of war occurred east of the berm, resulting in 4 local civilians being injured. West of the berm, 3 people were killed and 15 injured as a result of accidents caused by landmines or explosive remnants of war.

42. The Mine Action Coordination Centre, operated by the United Nations Mine Action Service, conducted survey and clearance of 3,123,830 m^2 of land contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war — releasing 24 medium and high-priority cluster strike areas and 11 minefields; 2,350,200 m^2 of route verifications east of the berm, an equivalent of 391.7 km, to facilitate MINURSO ground patrols; the destruction of a total of 102 items east of the berm; landmine safety training for 217 newly arrived personnel of MINURSO; and four landmine safety refresher training sessions for 34 participants. The Mine Action Coordination Centre conducted 37 quality assurance assessments of its operations.

43. The Royal Moroccan Army reported the clearance of more than 144,770,000 m^2 of land to the west of the berm and the destruction of 1,121 items, including 1,008 items of unexploded ordnance, as well as 57 anti-tank and 56 anti-personnel mines.

44. The Mine Action Coordination Centre conducted communication and coordination activities with Frente Polisario on mine action, to better ascertain the impact of landmines and other explosive remnants of war in Western Sahara.

C. Security

45. During the reporting period, MINURSO General Threat Assessment resulted in a moderate security level throughout the Mission's area of operation. East of the berm, the threat of terrorism, on the basis of direct threats received during the reporting period and earlier, was assessed as high. Owing to the level of threats in the region, the security of MINURSO was strengthened.

46. As part of the MINURSO security risk management measures approved in February 2017, the Mission's Security Section developed a priority list for their

[1] See also S/2017/307, para. 35; S/2016/355, para. 32; and S/2015/246, para. 24.

implementation. MINURSO is currently implementing these measures, focusing on security east of the berm and intends to complete the priority list in the 2018/19 budget year.

D. Substantive civilian activities

47. In the second half of April 2017, all the remaining MINURSO staff who had been expelled from Laayoune in March 2016 returned to their duty station (see S/2017/307, para. 14), allowing MINURSO to return to full functionality, as stipulated in Security Council resolution 2285 (2016). Currently, 21 per cent of international civilian staff and United Nations Volunteers and 18 per cent of local staff are women. Despite challenges due to the nature and environment of the mission, MINURSO is working to improve its gender balance.

48. Within the constraints imposed, MINURSO continued to provide regular reporting and analysis to the Secretariat on developments in and affecting Western Sahara. The Mission also continued to receive regular visits by representatives of Member States.

49. After assuming his functions in late December, my Special Representative was received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Morocco and the Minister of the Interior of Morocco, Abdelouafi Laftit, who renewed their assurances of full cooperation with MINURSO on matters related to the Mission's mandate. They reiterated the official position of Morocco on the conflict in Western Sahara and raised concerns about the resumed Frente Polisario presence in Guerguerat. In March 2018, my Special Representative travelled to Tindouf, where he visited the refugee camps, accompanied by Frente Polisario members. My Special Representative and MINURSO endeavoured to maintain sustained, consultative and transparent contacts with the parties, primarily through their respective coordination offices.

50. East of the berm and in the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, the Mission enjoyed unhindered access to interlocutors, including representatives of Frente Polisario, refugees and local and international civil society organizations.

51. The lack of progress in the political process, however, continued to affect perceptions of MINURSO and the United Nations by the parties and the general public from both sides.

E. Challenges to the operations of the Mission

52. The parties' diverging interpretations of the Mission's mandate remained the most significant challenge to the operation of the Mission. Morocco maintained that the Mission's mandate is essentially limited to ceasefire monitoring, supporting demining and assisting UNHCR with confidence-building measures if these were to resume after their interruption in 2014. Morocco did not agree with any MINURSO activities beyond this interpretation, such as human rights monitoring or interaction with the local population for the purposes of political reporting. Thus, the only interlocutors that Morocco permitted west of the berm were members of the Moroccan coordination office with MINURSO and the Royal Moroccan Army. Access to other interlocutors (see S/2017/307, para. 51) has yet to be restored. Morocco argues that standard peacekeeping functions do not apply to MINURSO, as the Mission's mandate and activities need to take into account the specificities of the situation in Western Sahara.

53. Frente Polisario continued to see organizing a referendum on self-determination as the central element of the MINURSO mandate, with ceasefire monitoring and other activities subordinate or instrumental to that aim. It also consistently called on the United Nations to establish a human rights monitoring mechanism in Western Sahara.

54. The United Nations maintained that the Mission's mandate was set out in successive Security Council resolutions and includes independent reporting to the Council on developments in and related to Western Sahara, for which it requires unhindered access to interlocutors. Furthermore, effective situational awareness is key to the Mission's ability to fulfil its mandate and ensure the security of its personnel and premises, regardless of mandate interpretation.

55. Regarding ceasefire monitoring and compliance, the lack of a joint commission, as exists in other contexts, consisting of representatives of the parties and MINURSO, also posed challenges to the prompt and timely handling of allegations of violations, as MINURSO needed to liaise with the parties separately for each allegation.

56. Security considerations continued to have a major impact on ceasefire monitoring and resupply of logistics. Ground patrols east of the berm are limited in range during the day and do not operate at night. Logistics convoys are vulnerable and depend upon prior aerial reconnaissance of routes. Aerial patrols will become more available thanks to a third helicopter, but will remain limited to daylight hours.

57. West of the berm, the Mission's vehicles continued to bear Moroccan number plates, affecting the perception of the Mission's impartiality and contrary to the agreement in principle reached with the Government of Morocco in 2015. Frente Polisario also continued to protest the Moroccan practice of affixing stamps on the passports of MINURSO staff members upon entry to and exit from Western Sahara (see S/2017/307, para. 58).

58. In Guerguerat, MINURSO observers remained limited in their ability to observe the area outside of the well-travelled portion of the road due to safety concerns (see S/2017/307, para. 57), in particular, landmines and explosive remnants of war. Therefore, observations on the ground continued to require the support of helicopter reconnaissance.

V. Humanitarian activities and human rights

A. Persons unaccounted for in the conflict

59. The International Committee of the Red Cross continued, as a neutral intermediary, to seek opportunities to enhance dialogue and facilitate the exchange of information between the parties, in respect of individuals who are still unaccounted for in relation to past hostilities.

B. Assistance to the protection of Western Saharan refugees

60. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners continued to provide international protection and assistance to Sahrawi refugees living in the five camps near Tindouf, Algeria. However, the consequences of underfunding on life-saving humanitarian assistance and the regular refugee programme were clearly visible. For example, UNHCR could provide an average of only 18 litres of drinking water per person per day, which is below the minimum standard of 20 litres.

61. For humanitarian planning purposes, UNHCR deployed a technical mission in January 2018 to review the Sahrawi in-camp population figure on the basis of sectoral data. The humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR and WFP continued to be based on previous planning figures. WFP provided additional food rations to persons with poor nutritional status. The number of vulnerable individuals as a subset of the estimated population will be further examined on the basis of a multi-agency vulnerability assessment.

62. The major public health issues affecting Saharawi refugees are non-communicable diseases and chronic malnutrition. WFP provided nutritionally balanced school meals for 40,500 children in the refugee camps, to encourage attendance and retention. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) continued to provide maternal and child health programmes, including the immunization of 22,000 children. To prevent sexual and gender-based violence, UNHCR opened a safe house for women in 2017.

63. To contribute to resilience and improve food security, UNICEF and WFP introduced pilot projects for complementary activities. The main challenge for humanitarian actors remained the funding shortfall. The humanitarian community launched an appeal for USD 137.6 million during 2016-2017, of which only 47 per cent was funded.

C. Confidence-building measures

64. The confidence-building measures, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1282 (1999) and subsequent resolutions, to allow family links between Saharawi refugees in the Tindouf camps and their communities of origin in the Western Sahara Territory remain on hold.

D. Human rights[1]

65. From 22 to 28 October, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment visited Morocco to advise the Government on establishing a national detention monitoring body to inspect places of detention, as envisaged in the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. As at 27 February, the Government had not established or designated such a mechanism. Discussions are ongoing. During its visit, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture assessed the treatment of persons deprived of liberty and the measures taken for their protection against torture and ill-treatment. It handed over a confidential report to the Government.

66. Torture and ill-treatment in places of deprivation of liberty, including owing to overcrowding and limited or no access to medical care, continued to be reported. According to various sources, the lack of accountability for human rights violations perpetrated against Sahrawis was a major concern during the reporting period, with international and national organizations reporting a persisting lack of investigations into allegations of such acts.

67. On 19 July, a Moroccan court of appeal sentenced 23 Sahrawi activists to prison terms of between two years and life on charges relating to the killing of 11 Moroccan

[1] Gaps in human rights reporting remain, owing to the limited monitoring capacity of OHCHR. To date, OHCHR has been able to conduct four assessment missions in Western Sahara, in 2006, 2014 and 2015. In resolution 2351 (2017), the Security Council commended OHCHR missions and encouraged all parties to continue cooperating with the Office, including through facilitating further visits to the region.

security officers in 2010. As at 5 February, the Gdeim Izik's case (see S/2017/307, para. 74), was being reviewed by the Court of Cassation. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) received several communications from lawyers and or family members reporting serious breaches to the principles of fair trial. The Secretary-General of Frente Polisario wrote to me again on 21 July, denouncing the sentences. He also called on the United Nations to request the immediate release of the 23 detainees.

68. Several Saharawi human rights groups continued to experience difficulties in carrying out their activities, as the Government of Morocco rejected their applications for registration and, therefore, legal recognition.

69. Alleged harassment by the Moroccan authorities of Saharan human rights defenders also remains of serious concern. Restrictions were reportedly imposed on human rights defenders wanting to enter and leave the Territory. In 2017, according to local and international sources, the Moroccan authorities continued to restrict access to Western Sahara for foreign visitors, including journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers from Morocco.

70. Although it remained difficult to obtain independent confirmation, various sources reported that the Moroccan authorities continued to routinely prevent or disperse gatherings in Western Sahara west of the berm. In several instances, protesters and activists were allegedly subjected to arbitrary arrests, unfair trials and imprisonment on ostensibly trumped-up charges. OHCHR received several communications from local non-governmental organizations stating that the Moroccan security forces had forcibly dispersed protests.

71. Available information indicates that Sahrawis continued allegedly to face discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. During the third universal periodic review of Morocco, in May, the Moroccan delegation affirmed that all Moroccan citizens were equal before the law in terms of rights and responsibilities. It ascertained that the people of the Sahara were an integral component of the defence of the territorial integrity and national unity and were associated in all development processes at the national, regional and local levels, either through elected representative bodies, professional bodies or civil society organizations that worked freely within the legal and constitutional framework of the country (see A/HRC/36/6, para. 31). Moroccan and international investments in the territorial waters adjacent to Western Sahara remained a subject of contention between the Government of Morocco and Frente Polisario.

72. The situation of the Sahrawi refugees raises multiple human rights concerns, many linked to the non-realization of the right to self-determination, such as the dire humanitarian situation they face, coupled with the lack of access to natural wealth and resources in Western Sahara west of the berm.

73. The few local human rights groups that exist in the refugee camps reportedly continued to operate freely, without any reported impediments. During the reporting period, Frente Polisario expressed readiness to cooperate with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

VI. African Union

74. During the reporting period, Morocco did not allow the African Union Observer Mission to return to Laayoune and resume its collaboration with MINURSO. During its thirtieth ordinary session, held from 28 to 29 January, in Addis Ababa, the Assembly of the African Union supported the United Nations-led relaunching of the negotiation process and reiterated its call upon the parties to engage in direct and

serious talks without preconditions and to fully cooperate with the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Assembly further urged Morocco to allow the African Union Observer Mission to return to Laayoune.

VII. Financial aspects

75. The General Assembly, in its resolution 71/309, appropriated $52.0 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. My proposed budget in the amount of $53.9 million (exclusive of budgeted voluntary contributions in kind) for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 was submitted to the Assembly for its consideration during the second part of its resumed seventy-second session. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of MINURSO beyond 30 April 2018, the cost of maintaining the Mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

76. As at 13 March 2018, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for MINURSO amounted to $ 41.7 million. Troop costs were reimbursed for the period up to 31 October 2017, while the costs of contingent-owned major equipment and self-sustainment were reimbursed for the period up to 30 September 2017, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

VIII. Observations and recommendations

77. In my previous report (S/2017/307), I proposed that the negotiating process be relaunched with a new dynamic and a new spirit that reflects the Security Council's guidance, with the aim of reaching a just, durable and mutually acceptable solution to the conflict in Western Sahara that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The Security Council, in its resolution 2351 (2017), affirmed its full support for this proposal. I am encouraged by the steps taken by my Personal Envoy to relaunch the political process since his appointment. I welcome his first visit to the region, where he was received at the highest level, as well as subsequent in-depth bilateral consultations with the parties, neighbouring States and other stakeholders. The numerous private and public expressions of support for the efforts of my Personal Envoy are also an important signal that a new dynamic is already in play.

78. To maintain this positive momentum, additional steps need to be taken by the parties, neighbouring countries and other relevant interlocutors to reflect in their own positions the new spirit and dynamic the Council has called for. In its resolutions since the beginning of 2007, the Security Council has directed me to facilitate direct negotiations between the parties without preconditions, in good faith, taking into account the efforts made since 2006 and subsequent developments, working with realism and a spirit of compromise. The Council has also called on the parties to show political will, work in an atmosphere favouring dialogue and discuss each other's proposals to prepare for a fifth round of formal negotiations. I call upon the parties to continue to work with my Personal Envoy in this new spirit and dynamic and to genuinely commit to the negotiating process in accordance with the guidance provided by Security Council resolutions.

79. The negotiating process does not occur in a vacuum. In the era of global interdependence, the socioeconomic, humanitarian and security implications of this protracted conflict weigh heavily on regional and subregional integration. I would

See Assembly/AU/6(XXX), para. 17. Available from https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/33908-assembly_decisions_665_-_689_e.pdf.

like to reiterate the Security Council's call upon neighbouring States, Algeria and Mauritania, to make important contributions to the political process and to increase their engagement in the negotiating process.

80. I am concerned about the possible resumption of tensions following the renewed presence of Frente Polisario in Guerguerat and the challenges that such actions by either party may present to the ceasefire. I recognize the measured response of Morocco in keeping its troops well away from the buffer strip during the tensions. I call upon Frente Polisario to withdraw from the buffer strip as it did in April 2017. I call upon both parties to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid escalating tensions, and to refrain from taking any action which may constitute a change in the status quo at the buffer strip. With respect to the efforts of the United Nations to address the questions raised by the situation in Guerguerat, I welcome the positive response of Frente Polisario to my proposal to deploy an expert mission as part of this process and strongly encourage Morocco to reconsider this initiative so that both parties can engage in a bona fide discussion on the matter.

81. Further, I remain deeply concerned about security in Western Sahara, in particular in the vast and empty desert expanse east of the berm, where unarmed military observers of MINURSO remain vulnerable to threats by criminal and terrorist groups. The Mission's ground movements east of the berm remain particularly vulnerable, considerably straining the limited aviation resources within the Mission to verify their routes. MINURSO has also allocated considerable effort and resources to upgrading its static security measures at all its locations, in particular east of the berm. I proposed additional funding for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 to complete this essential work and to allow the Mission to move forward with acquiring its third helicopter. I am grateful for the Council's continued support for the Mission's efforts to strengthen the security of its facilities and staff operating under strenuous conditions.

82. MINURSO has conducted a range of reviews and assessments to strengthen security, improve performance and reorganize staffing in order to achieve its goals more efficiently and consider new technologies to reduce risk, improve force protection and better implement the mandate assigned by the Security Council. A number of these recommended measures will require adequate resources, for which the support of the Security Council will be critical. Further to these initiatives I intend to conduct, in mid-2018, a strategic review of MINURSO to provide an in-depth analysis of the Mission and recommend measures to improve its mandate delivery.

83. The parties, while occasionally violating the letter of the ceasefire and military agreements, on the whole respected the spirit of the agreements, while also engaging promptly with MINURSO and the Secretariat when potential violations arose. Longstanding violations have nonetheless had a significant impact on the balance of military power and on the United Nations, which risks seeing its capabilities, integrity and perceived independence gradually eroded.

84. The Mission's effectiveness depends also on its ability to exercise the full range of standard peacekeeping functions, to inform an impartial and independent assessment of developments on the ground, as these may have a bearing on the political process and the broader peace and stability in Western Sahara. I continue to call for the support of the Security Council in this regard.

85. The contribution of MINURSO to maintaining the ceasefire remains as relevant as ever, a central and necessary role in preventing conflict, thus creating the conditions for the resumption of negotiations in the context of my efforts and those of my Personal Envoy. Despite constraints, the Mission's role in keeping the Secretariat and the Security Council informed of developments in and related to Western Sahara makes a significant contribution to progress in the negotiating

process, while also supporting regional stability. I therefore recommend that the Council extend the mandate of MINURSO for a further 12 months, until 30 April 2019.

86. I remain concerned about the increasing level of exasperation among the refugee communities in Tindouf, after more than 42 years in the camps, with limited hope. While confidence-building measures, which remain currently suspended, have an essential humanitarian component, they cannot be seen as a solution to the political impasse. I therefore call upon all actors to support the political process and work towards an acceptable solution for the refugees which allows for a life in dignity.

87. I also note with great concern the chronic lack of funding for humanitarian assistance despite increasing needs. For 2018, humanitarian needs for UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP are $58.5 million. I therefore call upon the international community to continue its support for this vital humanitarian programme.

88. I urge the parties to respect and promote human rights, including in addressing outstanding human rights issues and enhancing cooperation with the OHCHR and the United Nations human rights mechanisms, and facilitate their follow-up missions. Independent, impartial, comprehensive and sustained monitoring of the human rights situation is necessary to ensure the protection of all people in Western Sahara.

89. The conflict over Western Sahara has lasted for too long and must be brought to an end for the sake and the dignity of the population of Western Sahara, including those who have been displaced for more than four decades, as well as for the stability of the wider region, which is facing myriad political, economic and security challenges. In this regard, the work of my Personal Envoy, MINURSO and of the United Nations agencies remains indispensable.

90. I am grateful to the neighbouring States, the Members of the Group of Friends on Western Sahara and other relevant interlocutors for lending their support to the political process. I would like to express my particular appreciation to the Government of Spain for continuing to facilitate the visits of my Personal Envoy to the region by providing an aircraft. I wish to extend my sincere thanks to my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Horst Koehler, for his engagement with the parties and neighbouring States. Similarly, I am grateful to my Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, Colin Stewart, his predecessor, Kim Bolduc, and Major General Wang Xiaojun, for their dedicated leadership of MINURSO. Finally, I would also like to thank the men and women of MINURSO for their dedicated and committed work, in difficult circumstances.

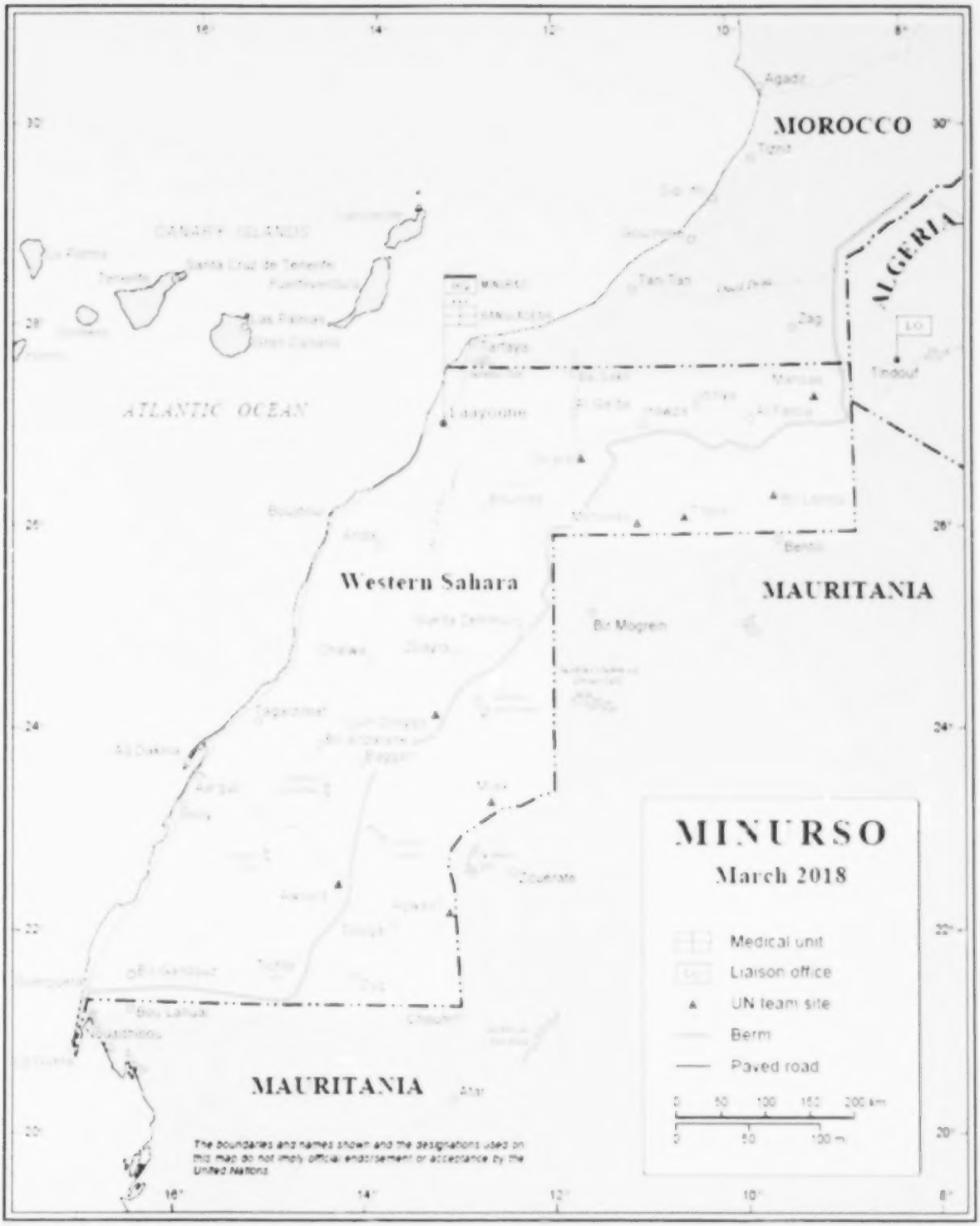
Annex

United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

Contributions as at 1 March 2018

Country	*Military observers*[a]	*Troops*[b]	*Civilian police*[c]	*Total*
Argentina	3	–	–	3
Austria	5	–	–	5
Bangladesh	6	20	–	26
Brazil	10	–	–	10
Bhutan	2	–	–	2
China	12	–	–	12
Croatia	7	–	–	7
Djibouti	2	–	–	2
Egypt	19	–	–	19
Ecuador	4	–	–	4
El Salvador	2	–	–	2
Finland	–	–	1	1
France	2	–	–	2
Germany	3	–	–	3
Ghana	6	7	–	13
Guinea	5	–	–	5
Honduras	12	–	–	12
Hungary	7	–	–	7
India	3	–	–	3
Indonesia	5	–	–	5
Ireland	3	–	–	3
Kazakhstan	3	–	–	3
Malawi	3	–	–	3
Mexico	4	–	–	4
Mongolia	4	–	–	4
Montenegro	2	–	–	2
Nepal	5	–	–	5
Nigeria	6	–	–	6
Pakistan	14	–	–	14
Poland	1	–	–	1
Portugal	–	–	1	1
Republic of Korea	4	–	–	4
Russian Federation	16	–	–	16
Sri Lanka	4	–	–	4
Sweden	4	–	–	4
Switzerland	2	–	–	2
Togo	2	–	–	2
Yemen	6	–	–	6
Total	**198**	**27**	**2**	**227**

[a] Authorized strength is 246, including the Force Commander.
[b] Authorized strength is 12.
[c] Actual strength on the ground, for military and civilian police, including the Force Commander.



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United Nations S/2018/278

Security Council

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Identical letters dated 29 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Upon instruction from my Government and with reference to the letter dated 26 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/266), and pursuant to my identical letters dated 15 February 2018 to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2018/123) regarding missile launches during the military aggression of Saudi Arabia against Yemen, while the Islamic Republic of Iran categorically rejects those baseless allegations contained in that letter, I have the honour to draw your attention to the following:

The Islamic Republic of Iran has never transferred or smuggled missiles, arms or military equipment to Yemen in violation of the Security Council resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015). Iran strongly opposes all biased and false claims in this regard. As Yemen is under total blockade by the Saudi-led Coalition, the possibility of smuggling ballistic missiles is an unfounded and imaginary claim. Accusing Iran of providing or smuggling missiles to one of the parties to the conflict in Yemen is nothing but an attempt to conceal the brutal and unlawful aggression in Yemen and the extremely appalling situation caused by such aggression, including the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and the humanitarian blockade that continues to impose intolerable suffering on the Yemeni people. In my letter dated 21 February 2018 addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2018/145) and in the letter dated 22 January 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Coordinator of the Panel of Experts on Yemen (S/2018/68, appendix E to annex 36), we explained the serious flaws regarding the authenticity and credibility of such claims.

It has been the usual practice by the Saudi regime, as the main party responsible for such a catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen, to cover up its reprehensible crimes by introducing false charges against other countries or attempting to spread the crisis beyond Yemen's borders in order to divert attention from the root cause of the Yemeni crisis, i.e. the military aggression by Saudi Arabia. The usual scenario for the political and military authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been to repeat their unfounded assumptions and allegations followed by the threat of use of force against a United Nations Member State in clear defiance of Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations. The last case was the unlawful statement by coalition spokesman Turki Al-Malki on 26 March 2018.

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Iran strongly urges the Saudi regime to immediately put an end to its destabilizing policies in the region, including its military intervention, as well as its starvation campaign in Yemen, and continues to call on all parties in Yemen to pursue diplomatic ways and means to resolve the conflict.

The Islamic Republic of Iran considers the military aggression of Saudi Arabia in Yemen to be the main underlying reason for the escalation of the crisis and the creation of the current disastrous situation in that country. Numerous reports by the United Nations and other relevant bodies and institutions have so far documented the crimes committed by the Saudi-led coalition against Yemeni civilians, as well as many incidences of engagement by the Coalition in violating international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The implementation of Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) shall not be interpreted in a way that creates commitment only for one party and leaves the other party empty-handed in terms of the disastrous humanitarian situation created as the result of aggression. The Security Council has confined its role to calling on all parties to comply with international humanitarian law; there has never been any independent authority to secure humanitarian access in Yemen.

At the same time, it is tragic that the three permanent members of the Security Council who stoke smuggling allegations against Iran in tandem with the Saudi regime are the ones who are selling billions of dollars of deadly, advanced weaponry to Saudi Arabia that are regularly used against civilians and civilian targets in Yemen.

It is imperative for the international community to stand up against these tired, misleading accusations of the Saudi regime against others and hold Saudi regime leaders accountable for their criminal acts, whereby intervening can effectively end the senseless aerial attacks, stop the selling of arms to Saudi Arabia, establish a ceasefire, ensure the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance to the people of Yemen without any discrimination, and restore peace and stability in this country through Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue on national reconciliation without preconditions.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Gholamali **Khoshroo**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative